

MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

SEPTEMBER 1980

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The New Mike Shayne
Short Novel
YESTERDAY'S ANGEL
by Brett Halliday

OUTLAWS
A Novelet
by Carl Hoffman

Short Stories by
DENNIS ETCHISON
EDWARD D. HOCH

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YESTERDAY'S ANGEL

by Brett Halliday

Lustrous dark hair framed the girl's face. Her eyes were large and dark, her body slender and well-formed. "Michael!" she whispered. Shayne's eyes were cloudy, the color of ice. He said, "Oh, no." The girl smiled. "Yes, Michael, it's me — your wife, Phyllis!" And then Shayne was in her arms, crushing her to him, burying his face in hair the color of midnight and saying softly over and over, "Angel, Angel — "..... 6

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MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAKERS

EDWARD D. HOCH is certainly no stranger to the pages of MSMM, nor to most of the past and present mystery magazines throughout the world. Born in 1930 in Rochester, New York, he studied at the University of Rochester, served in the U.S. Army 1950-1952, was employed at the Rochester Public library, at Pocket Books in New York City, and by Hutchins Advertising Agency before becoming a full-time writer in 1968. In 1957 he married Patricia A. McMahon. He's probably best known for his more than five hundred short stories and novelets, but he's written several novels which you Ed Hoch fans might want to look up: *The Shattered Raven* (Lancer, 1969; Dale, 1978); *The Transvection Machine* (Walker, 1971; Pocket Books, 1973); *The Fellowship of the Hand* (Walker, 1973); and *The Frankenstein Factory* (Warner Books, 1975).



CARL HOFFMAN (author of *Outlaws* in this issue) is a native of Racine, Wisconsin, scene of a spectacular 1933 bank robbery led by John Dillinger. He has worked at jobs ranging from truck driver to radio newsman, and is currently completing his master's thesis, a collection of detective stories, at the University of Alabama.

LEE G. MOLER (*The Smiling Corpse*) tells us:

I became interested in mysteries as a genre in 1969. I was in Vietnam at the time serving as a machine gunner. The question of how I got there, not to mention the more difficult one of how I could get out, led naturally to a fascination with the foibles of human nature.

Since that time I have been a construction worker, television news director, social worker, disc jockey, and recipient of unemployment insurance benefits.

I have a Bachelor's degree in Journalism and an A.A. degree in Respiratory Therapy. I currently work as a therapist in a small community hospital while pursuing a writing career.

My checkered employment history has taught me several things which readers may find interesting. These follow:

1. Always go to the unemployment office when called; they pay for time, not answers.
2. When swinging a sledge hammer, focus on the memory of the last hit, not the head of the spike.
3. Never drink red wine before appearing on color television. It makes your teeth look purple.
4. Going to a hospital helps you to get well if you are sick. It helps you get sick if you're well.
5. Social workers smoke almost as many cigarettes as mental patients.
6. Being a disc jockey isn't as easy as it sounds; but it's not as hard as working.

The stories of DENNIS ETCHISON (*You Can Go Now*, in this issue) have been appearing in mystery, science fiction, fantasy and men's magazines since the early sixties, as well as in many anthologies, most recently in the best of the current and upcoming crop of original and reprint horror collections (*Frights, Shadows, Whispers, Nightmares, Mad Scientists, Dark Forces, New Terrors, Year's Best Horror Stories*, etc.). He has been both a nominee (1977) and a judge (1979) of the World Fantasy Awards. A novel, *The Fog*, was published in February by Bantam Books to coincide with the release of John Carpenter's film.

JERRY JACOBSON (*Correspondence With A Bicycle Thief*) has had published more than 250 short stories and 50 novelets. His story "Rite of Spring" was included in the *Best Detective Stories of the Year, 1979*.



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YESTERDAY'S



ANGEL

by BRETT HALLIDAY

LUCY HAMILTON WAS CONTENT as she lounged on the comfortable sofa in the apartment of her friend and employer, Michael Shayne. She stretched her sleek legs in front of her and closed her eyes. She was alone in the apartment, but the big redhead would be arriving soon. A meeting downtown had detained him, so Lucy had gone to the apartment to fix dinner for them. Now, two thick steaks were thawing and a bottle of champagne was chilling, and the evening looked very promising.

They deserved rest and relaxation, Lucy decided. Shayne's caseload had been heavy, befitting his reputation as Miami's top private detective, and they had both been working long hours. The report he was

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delivering to a client tonight would close the books on a highly profitable case — just cause for a celebration.

Lucy sighed and opened her eyes. She was so comfortable that it would have been easy to drop off to sleep. But it was time to check the steaks. Standing, she stretched her lithe body and then walked into the kitchen.

The steaks were just about thawed. Lucy paused beside the bucket which held the chilling champagne and lifted the towel from the bottle snuggling into a nest of ice. The thick glass of the bottle was cold to the touch of her long, slender fingers.

Lucy hummed softly to herself as she went about the kitchen, preparing the meal. She loved her job as Shayne's secretary and was damn good at her job, but a little domesticity felt nice every so often, too.

As she worked, she couldn't help but think about the big redheaded man who occupied such a big portion of her life. They had been through a lot together since their first meeting many years before, while Shayne was on a case in New Orleans. At first she never would have dreamed that she would wind up back in Miami with him, becoming his secretary and much, much more. But she was glad that things had worked out as they had, glad that she was able to help Michael and make him happy.

When she had the steaks cooking and a fresh salad tossed, she strolled back into the living room of the apartment. It was early evening now, with dusk falling softly in Miami, and Lucy went to the window of Shayne's apartment to look out at the city that was now her home. The lights were starting to come on in the surrounding buildings. A few blocks away, she could see the waters of Biscayne Bay, with the Miami River flowing into it. Across the Bay was the glitter of Miami Beach, which was at the height of its season.

Lucy glanced at the clock on the wall. It was six-thirty now. Shayne's appointment had been at five-thirty, so he should be arriving at any minute. She looked down Second Avenue, to see if she could spot his Buick. If she saw him coming in time, she could have a tumbler of Martell with an ice water chaser waiting for him.

She didn't see the Buick, but she did see something that drew her attention. There was a dark-haired girl walking rapidly down the opposite side of the street, looking back over her shoulder every so often and clutching a light jacket around her. Lucy frowned slightly; she could almost feel the girl's apprehensiveness, even at this distance. And there was something else about her, something that struck a vague chord of recognition inside Lucy.

There wasn't time to puzzle out what it was, though. The girl reached the end of the block, paused to study the numbers on the buildings, and then started to cross the street. She looked up, and Lucy suddenly felt as if the girl were looking directly at her.

Whatever it was the girl was concentrating on almost cost her her life. With unexpected suddenness, a car pulled out from the curb down the block and came toward her, its tires squealing on the asphalt. The sound was all the warning the girl had.

Watching from above, Lucy gasped. Only a few feet separated the girl from the hurtling bulk of the large car. The girl's head snapped around, and then she moved as if galvanized by a sudden jolt of electricity.

She half-leaped, half-fell out of the path of the speeding car. It slammed past her, and Lucy knew that the girl would have been crushed if she hadn't moved so quickly. The girl had gone to one knee as the car went past, and now she was trying to get to her feet.

Brake lights flared. The car rocked to a stop. Two men leaped out and ran toward the frightened girl. She looked at them — and even though Lucy couldn't hear it — let out a cry of fear. There was a lull in the traffic, and no one was around to give her any help. No one but Lucy Hamilton.

Lucy whirled and ran for the phone. If she could call the police, they might get there in time . . .

Her fingers seemed blunt and clumsy as she dialed the familiar number. The call finally went through, and Lucy bit her lip hard as she listened to several rings before the phone on the other end was picked up. When the desk sergeant identified himself, Lucy opened her mouth to blurt out what she had seen — but a new sound intruded on her hearing.

Footsteps. Running footsteps. Coming down the hall outside the apartment door!

The footsteps stopped when someone ran into the door and began pounding on it. A terrified voice cried, "Help me! Michael, please help me!"

Lucy dropped the phone and ran to the door, jerking it open. As the girl stumbled into the apartment, Lucy gave her a pull to get her completely inside, then stuck her head out to glance down the hall. She saw what she was afraid she would see.

The girl's two pursuers were emerging from the stairwell, grim looks on their faces.

Lucy slammed the door and threw the bolt.

The dark-haired girl was standing in the center of the living room,

her hands held to her face and her eyes staring in panic. Those eyes locked on Lucy's and she exclaimed, "Don't let them in here! They want to kill me!"

Lucy's heart pounded, sending adrenaline and fear through her veins. The men would have seen her slam the door; they would know that the girl had come here. It would be only seconds before they got here, and from what she had seen so far, Lucy didn't think they would stop at breaking down a door.

Lucy ran past the girl, heading for the bedroom, threw the door open and went straight to the night table beside Shayne's bed, jerking open the drawer and darting her hand inside. Her fingers closed over the butt of the .32 revolver.

There was no time to check to see if it was loaded. Knowing Michael as she did, she was sure it was. She ran back into the living room, clutching the pistol tightly, and spotted the dangling telephone receiver. Faint squawking noises came from it.

Snatching it up, Lucy barked the address into it and told the confused desk sergeant to send a car right away. She hung up as a heavier pounding began on the door.

"Police!" a harsh voice growled. "Open up in there, lady!"

When the girl started to scream, Lucy turned a hard-eyed gaze on her, clamped her free hand on the girl's shoulder, and pushed her down onto the sofa. "Quiet!" She turned back toward the door.

"What do you want?" she called through it.

"We want that little gal who just ran in there, lady," the voice snapped. "Open up, and there won't be any trouble."

Lucy knew good and well they weren't cops — cops don't try to deliberately run people down — but maybe she could stall them long enough for the real thing to arrive.

"No one ran in here —" she began.

Another voice said, "Goddam, go ahead and bust the door down. We ain't got all night!"

There was a heavy thud, and the door shuddered. It wouldn't stand much of that.

The men hit the door again, and Lucy raised the gun and put her left hand on her right wrist to steady it.

Another thud, and the door popped open.

Lucy's brown eyes took it all in rapidly. The two men came through the door slightly off-balance, and neither one of them had a gun in evidence. They must not have been expecting armed opposition.

Lucy showed them differently.

She squeezed the trigger gently but rapidly, the way Shayne had

taught her. The recoil ripped up her arm, but she kept the gun under control, triggering off three shots.

The slugs burned through the air around the men. Lucy had missed on purpose, but the bullets were close enough to make both men yelp and jump backwards. In the sudden silence following the shots, Lucy heard the approaching wail of a siren.

Curses ripped from the men, who fled into the hall. One of them said, "Let's get out of here!"

Lucy stood still, breathing deeply and rapidly, the gun still trained on the door. She could hear the men running back down the hall toward the stairs. There was a good chance that they would get away, but she didn't care at the moment. She was more concerned with getting her pulse back under control.

After a moment, she went over to the door and pushed it closed, even though it wouldn't catch due to the damage being forced open had done to it. She turned to the still-staring girl on the sofa.

"You'll be all right now," Lucy said quietly. "Those men have gone, and they won't bother you anymore."

The girl looked up at her, took a deep, shuddery breath, and said, "Thank you. They were going to kill me, I know they were. You saved my life."

Lucy laid the pistol on the table beside the telephone and studied the girl again. There was something familiar about her, as if they had met before, and yet Lucy could have sworn that this was the first time she had seen the girl.

Lustrous dark hair, parted in the middle and bearing a slight wave, framed the girl's face. The eyes that looked at Lucy were large and dark, and her body was slender and well-formed under the light jacket and skirt. There was no denying that she was beautiful.

"Who were those men?" Lucy asked. "Why were they after you?"

"I — I don't know. I just know they've been following me. I was afraid they'd hurt me. They tried to run over me!"

"I know. I saw it from the window. But you don't know who they are, or why they're after you?"

The girl shook her head. "No. I just knew they were dangerous. That's why I had to get here, why I had to find *him*."

Lucy frowned again. "Why you had to find who? And why did you come to this apartment, instead of trying to get someone downstairs to help you?"

"I knew *he*'d help me if I could find him. This is his apartment, isn't it?"

Fighting back a feeling of exasperation, Lucy asked, "Just who is it

you're looking for? And who are you, if you don't mind my asking?"

The dark eyes widened and became even larger. The girl said, "Why, I'm looking for Michael Shayne, the private detective. Who else would I get to help me? And who are you? I mean, I appreciate your helping me, but what are *you* doing here?"

She sounded almost offended, as if she had just realized something. Lucy shook her head in bafflement and said, "I asked first. You tell me who you are and why you're looking for Michael."

She wasn't ready for the answer she got.

"I'm looking for him because he's my husband," the girl said matter-of-factly. "I'm Phyllis Shayne."

II

IF LUCY HAMILTON HAD BEEN THE TYPE, she would have stood there with her mouth hanging open. As it was, she kept her face under control, but her surprise showed in the stiffening of her body.

Phyllis Shayne . . . So that was why the girl had looked familiar —

No, that was impossible. Phyllis had been dead for years, since well before the time Michael Shayne had gone to New Orleans on a case and met a young girl named Lucile Hamilton. Lucy had seen pictures of Phyllis, though, since Michael made no secret of his marriage, and this girl was . . . well, a dead ringer. She looked just like the girl in the pictures, the girl who had looked up with such pride at her brawny, redheaded husband.

A long time had gone by since then, and this girl looked the same age as the one in the pictures. Lucy frowned. There was no way she could actually be Phyllis Shayne, but there was no mistaking the ring of truthfulness in her voice. That left only one answer . . .

The girl really thought that she was Phyllis.

Lucy took a deep breath. Her years of association with Shayne had exposed her to quite a few startling things, but she had never run across anything quite like this before. These waters were a little too swift and deep to be waded safely. She said haltingly, "Michael . . . Michael should be here soon."

The girl nodded. "Good. Now, I've told you who I am. How about you?"

"My name is Lucy Hamilton. I'm Michael's secretary."

The girl seemed to have lost some of her fear. She smiled slightly and said, "Goodness, when did Michael hire a secretary? I've been handling all of that kind of work."

Lucy swallowed. "Well . . . I guess he thought he needed some more help."

She was at a loss how to proceed. The girl obviously was convinced of the identity she claimed, and Lucy didn't want to say anything that might disturb her even more. She had to be suffering from some sort of mental problem

Dealing with that problem was postponed by the arrival of two uniformed policemen responding to her call. The girl sat quietly on the sofa while Lucy told them what she had seen and what had happened when the men broke the door down. Both of the cops knew that she was Shayne's secretary, so they accepted the story as she told it. When they questioned the girl, she told them that the men had been following her, but that she didn't know who they were or what they were after. The only thing that threw them was when they asked her name.

"Phyllis Shayne," she declared.

One of the officers was young, but the other was a veteran of quite a few years on the force. He looked quickly at Lucy. She nodded slightly, her face grim. That was easier than trying to explain right now.

The cops took down Lucy's description of the car. She hadn't been able to get the license number, and she didn't hold out much hope of them locating the men with such scanty information. She was relieved when they left, with promises to let Chief Will Gentry know what had happened.

Lucy shut the door behind them and turned back to the girl on the sofa. It was hard to believe, but only about fifteen minutes had gone by since Lucy had been relaxing on that very sofa, waiting for Michael and a pleasant evening. Those plans would have to be scrapped.

The girl stood up. "I — I think I'd like to freshen up," she said. "I must look pretty frightful."

She looked gorgeous, but Lucy wasn't going to tell her that. She said, "The bathroom is over there."

"I know." The girl started in that direction.

"Why don't I make us each a drink?" Lucy asked. "I think we could use one."

"Of course. Martell would be fine. I used to not like it, but I acquired a taste for it."

Lucy took another deep breath as the bathroom door closed behind the girl. This was a damned frustrating situation. She couldn't just out and out call the girl crazy, but there was no way that she could *really* be Phyllis Shayne.

Was there?

Lucy went to the liquor cabinet and began building drinks. She thought she might as well fix one for Michael, too, since he was bound to be arriving soon. He would be needing one.

Lucy's hand went to her mouth. *Michael!* She hadn't even thought about that angle of it. He would come through that busted door soon to see a girl who was the spitting image of his dear, dead wife, and Lucy had no idea how he would react to it.

She didn't have time to ponder the problem, though, because the door swung open at that moment and Michael Shayne strode into his apartment. The grin on his rugged face turned to a look of puzzlement when he saw the damaged door. He flipped his hat onto the telephone table and said, "What's up, Angel? Looks like somebody unlocked the door without a key. Are you all right?"

"I'm fine, Michael, but there was some trouble."

"So I see." Shayne's craggy red brows went up. "Did you call the cops?"

"Yes, they've been here and gone. I had to take some shots at a couple of men, Michael. They were after this girl, you see, and she came up here after they nearly ran her down in their car, and then they broke the door open. So I fired over their heads and scared them off."

Lucy had moved closer to Shayne as she told him what had happened, and now she came into his arms, pressing her face into his broad chest for a moment. His arms tightened around her and a knobby hand patted her back.

"It's okay, Angel," he said quietly. "You did the right thing to blast away at those guys. I'd have done the same thing, only I might not have been as nice about it as you. I wouldn't have missed on purpose. Where's this girl they were after? Was she looking for me?"

"Yes . . . She was looking for you, all right, Michael. She —"

"Is she still here?"

"She's in the bathroom. But, there's something you should know about her."

His grey eyes looked down at her. "Well, Angel, what is it?"

But before Lucy could tell him, an excited voice came from behind her.

"*Michael!*"

Shayne's hands were resting on her shoulders now, and as he looked past her, she felt the blunt fingers tightening, squeezing until pain began to throb in her neck. Shayne's eyes were cloudy, the color of ice, and he seemed to have stopped breathing. He whispered, "Oh, no. No. Oh, Lord!"

He let go of Lucy's shoulders. She closed her eyes as he stepped around her. She heard him say hesitantly, "Angel . . . ?"

And she knew he wasn't talking to her.

"Yes, Michael, it's me."

Lucy opened her eyes and turned around slowly, watching Shayne walk across the room toward the girl. She stood there, her arms out, welcoming the man she thought was her husband. And then Shayne was in her arms, crushing her to him, burying his face in hair the color of midnight and saying softly over and over, "Angel, Angel . . ."

MIKE SHAYNE HAD LIVED A RUGGED LIFE, surviving a knock-about existence as a young man before entering the demanding profession of private investigator. But nothing in his experience had been quite like this. A rush of emotion swept over and through him, so strong as to be almost overpowering. This was Phyllis standing before him — young, vibrant, lovely, looking almost exactly as she had when they had first met, when she was still Phyllis Brighton, a beautiful heiress who wanted to hire a less-than-respectable private eye to keep her from murdering her own mother. That had been the beginning of an unlikely relationship that had blossomed into an even more unlikely love and marriage several months later.

That was only one of the memories whirling through Shayne's stunned brain as he found himself embracing her, holding her tightly against him as though he would never let her go again. She had been lost, and was now found again, and was that much more precious to him . . . And unbidden, his mind replayed the days and months and years of their marriage, the years that had ended much too soon, remembering in split seconds everything that had happened —

Shayne's head jerked; he felt pain like he hadn't known in years. It wasn't physical pain; *that* he could deal with. It was the pain of memory, the kind that took his breath like a hard blow to the chest.

He remembered a long night years before, a night spent partly trying to straighten out a case that had turned unexpectedly deadly. The other part of the night, the worst part, had come later, in the last hours before dawn, while Shayne waited for his wife to deliver their child. That wait became unexpectedly deadly, too, when a long-faced doctor came to him with apologies and the worst news of all.

Phyllis and their newborn son were both gone, and a part of Shayne died with them. He had closed that part of himself off over the years, finally accepting the fact that the only way he could keep functioning was to put the pain and sorrow away from him.

But now it came flooding back. A muffled sound almost like a sob escaped from him, and he drew back from the girl. She still had her head pressed against his chest, and Lucy was standing behind him, so neither one of them could see the grimace that passed over his face. *This couldn't be Phyllis! There was no possible way, unless . . . the*

doctor had lied, or been mistaken, or . . .

No, Shayne thought. This isn't Phyllis!

Unaccountably, he felt relieved. Maybe this wasn't Phyllis, but whoever she was, she must be in some kind of trouble. A puzzle of some sort, he could deal with, but not an impossibility.

"Oh, Michael," the girl was crooning, "I'm so glad to see you again. I was afraid I'd never get back to you."

"You're here now," Shayne said slowly, putting her away from him enough to rest his hands on her shoulders, just as he had done with Lucy a moment earlier. "Why don't you sit down, and we'll talk about your trouble."

She smiled up at him, and her face looked positively radiant. "I don't have any troubles. Not now when I'm back with you where I belong, Michael."

She was a damn good actress. Either that, or she really believed everything she was saying. Shayne glanced over his shoulder and saw Lucy looking at him worriedly. His brow corrugated. If this girl thought she was really Phyllis, this could mean trouble, in more ways than one.

He said, "You just sit down, Angel, and we'll talk it over."

She sat down on the sofa, eyes still full of devotion and love. Shayne smiled tightly at her, massaged the lobe of his left ear briefly, and then swung back toward Lucy. He stepped closer to her and lowered his voice.

"I think I'd better try to get to the bottom of this," he said quietly. "Considering the circumstances —"

"It's all right, Michael," Lucy said. "I understand. You'll probably be able to concentrate better if I'm not around. The two of you can have the steaks. They should be about done."

"That's not what I meant at all, dammit," Shayne growled. "I don't want you to feel like I'm tossing you out or anything."

"I don't, Michael." Lucy picked up her purse. "I just . . . think it would be better if I left."

Shayne nodded grimly. He started to lean forward to kiss her goodbye, but she moved away smoothly, not like she was drawing away from him, but rather like she was going to the door normally.

"I'll call you later," Shayne said.

Lucy nodded. "That's fine."

Shayne glared at the door she pulled shut behind her. He knew her well enough to know that she was worried. And maybe even a little bit hurt.

"Michael," the girl said from the sofa, "when did you hire Miss Hamilton? I don't remember her. In fact, I — I don't remember a lot

of things. You'll help me, won't you, Michael?"

A note of desperation had entered her voice. Shayne walked across the room and sat down beside her, being careful not to get too close. She was breathtakingly lovely, and she looked so much like the girl she claimed to be.

He took a deep breath and said, "Of course, I'll help you. You just tell me all about it . . . Phyllis."

III

"THERE'S REALLY NOT ALL THAT MUCH I CAN TELL YOU, Michael," the dark-haired girl said, "because I don't remember much. I've been riding the bus for the past few days, trying to get back here to you."

"Where were you before that?" Shayne asked.

"That's one of the things I can't recall. It was like . . . like I was in a sound, dreamless sleep, and then I woke up suddenly and was on my way here. I knew I had to get to you. I knew that you would help me."

Shayne stood and walked slowly to the liquor cabinet, where he finished fixing the drinks Lucy had started. He took a healthy bite out of one, felt the smooth impact of the cognac. Then he turned back to the girl who was waiting with an expectant look on her face and said, "Are you telling me you've lost your memory? That you don't remember anything except being on the bus and coming here?"

His voice was a little harsh, and a worried expression appeared on the girl's face. *Damn*, Shayne thought. Even though it couldn't be, it was hard not to think of her as Phyllis. Everything about her was so familiar.

"You don't believe me," she said slowly. There was a hint of a tremor in her voice. "You think I'm lying to you. I wouldn't do that, Michael!"

He strode back across the room, handing her the other drink. "I didn't say I don't believe you," he declared. "I'd just like to know more about it. How else can I help you, if I don't know what we're dealing with?"

Some of the anxiety left her face. "I understand," she said. "I can see where you'd be surprised by all of this. How . . . long has it been since we've seen each other, Michael?"

He used a sip of cognac to mask the pained expression that flitted across his face. "Too long," he grunted. "But never mind that. We were talking about what you remembered."

The girl took a sip of her own drink, said, "It's strange, it really is. It's not like I've lost my memory completely, because I definitely re-

member certain things. I know that I'm Phyllis Shayne, and that you're my husband, Michael Shayne. You're a private detective, and you met me while you were on a case. We got married and moved into the apartment upstairs — " She broke off and looked around the room. "I thought this was your office now. It doesn't look like an office."

"I moved back down here — " Shayne caught himself just in time. He had been about to say that he had moved back into his old apartment after his wife died, but a blunt statement like that wouldn't do under the circumstances. He said instead, "I moved back down here when I opened another office on Flagler. That's where Miss Hamilton works."

The girl shook her head. She said, "My, a lot has happened while I was gone. It may take me some time to catch up."

She wasn't kidding there. A lot had happened, a lot of good times and bad, and most of them Shayne had shared with Lucy Hamilton. He felt a momentary twinge of guilt about how he had reacted when he first saw Phyllis — damn, there he was, doing it again! Well, for the moment and until he found out who she really was, it was easier to think of her that way. He said, "What else do you remember, Phyllis? What about the men who were after you?"

She leaned forward. "I'm not sure. Like I said, I remember being on the bus. It was going through Louisiana, I think, or Mississippi. And I knew that I was afraid, afraid of something, but I didn't know what. Then I thought about you, and since the bus was going in that direction anyway, I decided to come straight to Miami and find you, so that you could maybe explain all of it to me."

"I wish I could," Shayne murmured.

Phyllis closed her eyes in concentration. "I knew that I was in danger. The more I thought about it, the more I realized that someone was after me. Once, when the bus stopped, I saw some men standing in the station, like they were waiting for someone, and I knew they were waiting for me. I was too afraid to get off the bus. I saw them again later, at another stop, and that only made me more certain. I can't tell you *how* I know, Michael, but I know that they were after me, and that they'll kill me if they get the chance."

Shayne downed the rest of his drink and scraped a thumbnail along his jaw. No actress in the world was good enough to carry off what this girl was saying. She believed every word of it, and whatever her real identity was, at least some of her story was true. She was in danger, and considering what had happened earlier, it was even likely that the men she had seen were looking for her. But the why of it all was another question.

"What happened when the bus got here?" Shayne asked.

"I looked around the station before I got off, and I didn't see the men who were at the other stations. So I thought maybe they weren't here yet. I couldn't find a cab when I got off the bus, so I started to walk. I remembered this address, and it wasn't hard to find. The men were waiting for me, though." She raised her head and looked into his eyes. "They know who I am, Michael. They figured out that I would come here."

"That's what it looks like, Angel," Shayne agreed. As soon as he said it, he could have bitten his tongue for calling her by that endearment. If he wasn't careful, he'd have himself believing her fairy tale again, like he had wanted so desperately to at first.

"What are we going to do?" she asked. "They're bound to come back here, now that they know where I am."

Shayne nodded thoughtfully. "That's possible. So we need to figure out who they are and what they're after. Then maybe we can get in some licks of our own."

"But I just don't know who they are! And I can't imagine why they would be after me. I haven't done anything."

For the first time, Shayne heard a slight note of hesitation in her voice, as if she wasn't completely sure of what she was saying. He said quickly. "Do you have anything they might want?"

"N-no, I don't think so." But again, there was hesitation in her voice.

Shayne glanced around the room. "Did you have any luggage?"

She shook her head, the dark eyes large in her face. "No, I just had my purse, Michael." A sudden look of strain passed over her face, and she closed her eyes momentarily. When she opened them again, she said brightly, "I'm so glad you're going to help me. I know you'll take care of me, won't you, Michael? Come sit beside me again."

Shayne's mouth was grim and trenches had appeared in his lean cheeks, but he sat down on the sofa beside her, closer this time, and before he knew it, she was snuggling up against him. A flood of conflicting emotions went through him.

"Tell me about us, Michael," Phyllis said softly. "What happened? How did we get separated? I know I missed you so much!"

A fine film of sweat broke out on Shayne's forehead. He was torn between the desire to accept her, to hold her to him and be damned to who she really was, and the urge to push her away and shout out his rage at whatever cruel trick of fate had made her look and seem so much like the real Phyllis. He could feel his pulse speeding up, both

from the emotional turmoil within and from the warm intimacy of her body next to him. He had to play along, at least for the moment, if he wanted to find out what was really going on — but Lord, it was hard!

"You had to go away for a while," Shayne said slowly. "You were sick, and you needed time to recover, to get your strength back. I'm glad you're back, Phyllis, and I hope you don't have to go away again."

"Oh, Michael . . ."

Her head tilted back, her eyes closed, and before he could stop it, his mouth had come down on her slightly parted mouth. They were warm and soft, and they played against his with hunger and need. Shayne felt his arms pulling her closer, felt all the lush, familiar contours of her body pressing against him. He broke the kiss long enough to murmur, "Phyl . . ." and then their lips were together again.

She let out a soft cry as he tore away from her and stood up abruptly, stalking across the room to stare angrily out the window at the Miami night. Moving slowly and deliberately to suppress the trembling in his fingers, he took out a cigarette and lit it. He took a deep drag and let the smoke trickle from his nostrils, to curl lazily around his head. His grey eyes were blazing.

The cost of that moment of weakness was high, and now he was paying for it. Letting her go had been the hardest thing he had done in years, and now he was hurting from it.

He had to think logically and get his mind off the emotionalism of this situation. This girl wasn't Phyllis, he knew that, but she thought she was, and she was in trouble. There was no way he could live with himself if he didn't help her.

Shayne swung back toward her and said quietly, "All right, Phyllis, I'll help you. We'll work this out together, and we'll find out why those men are after you. They won't bother you as long as you're here, I can promise you that."

She stood and ran to him, face wreathed in smiles, but this time when she threw her arms around his neck, he didn't return the embrace. She was babbling her love and gratitude to him when he gently took her arms and began to guide her across the room.

"You must be exhausted," he said. "Why don't you go on in the bedroom and lie down, get some rest. That'll probably do you more good than anything else right now."

"I am tired," she said. "But Michael . . . you'll come in, too, won't you?"

Shayne's nostrils flared slightly. That would be a mistake, and he knew it. He said, "I'll be in a little later. I've got to do something about

that busted door, and I've got some thinking to do. I want to get your problems cleared up just as fast as I can."

That was the truth. The sooner this was cleared up, the sooner things would get back to some semblance of normalcy.

"All right," Phyllis said, pausing in the doorway of the bedroom. "But I'll be waiting for you, Michael."

IV

SHAYNE WAS GLAD WHEN THE DOOR CLOSED BEHIND HER. Maybe with her in the other room where he couldn't see her, he could think a little straighter. Clearing this up was going to take some straight thinking.

His first move was to refill his tumbler with Martell. Lucy had said something about there being steaks in the kitchen, but he wasn't hungry right now. He sipped the brandy and then went over to the door in the hall.

The facing around the lock was splintered and would have to be replaced. He wasn't sure if the management of the building knew what had happened or not, but they couldn't do anything about it tonight even if they did. Tomorrow would be soon enough for that. Shayne pushed the door all the way closed and then pulled a heavy armchair over in front of it to keep it that way. The chair wouldn't stop anybody from getting in, but moving it would make enough racket to give him plenty of warning that someone was coming in.

He went to another chair and sprawled in it, stretching his long legs out in front of him and rumpling his coarse red hair with his fingers. Images of Phyllis on the other side of the bedroom door kept coming into his mind, and he tried to drive them out.

All he succeeded in doing was recalling the first time he had sent Phyllis into that room. He had been hiding her from Will Gentry and Peter Painter, who had headed the detective bureaus in Miami and Miami Beach respectively at that time. Painter would have bet every three hundred dollar suit in his stylish wardrobe that Phyllis was guilty of murdering her mother, and it had fallen to Shayne to clear her name by exposing the real killer. That case had been a turning point in his life, in more ways than one.

Shayne shook his head and scowled. Dwelling on the past wouldn't help him solve the problems of the present. He mentally listed the few facts that he knew and tried to arrange them into some sort of pattern.

It might be that the men weren't after the girl, but rather, something she had in her possession. Shayne looked around the room. Her purse

was nowhere in sight; she must have taken it into the bedroom with her. He would make a point of getting a look inside it later.

She claimed that she had been on an eastbound bus through the South. If that was true, she could have come from anywhere west of Louisiana. Shayne couldn't see anything promising in that line of thought.

Perhaps the most puzzling thing was why the girl was suffering from the delusion that she was Phyllis Shayne. He could see no reason for that. Obviously, the girl knew what she was talking about, was familiar with Phyllis' background, as well as with the details of her marriage to Shayne. Those days were years in the past, and for anyone to be so familiar with them that hadn't lived through them would require some study.

Shayne's eyes narrowed as he thought. Someone had done quite a bit of digging into the past, and he wasn't going to be satisfied until he knew why.

The telephone on the table next to him shrilled, breaking into his thoughts.

Shayne brushed aside the hat he had tossed on the table earlier and plucked the receiver from its cradle. He grunted, "Yeah?"

A man's voice asked, "Is this Mike Shayne?"

"That's right. Who's this?"

"My name is Gareth Maxwell, Mr. Shayne. I'm sorry to disturb you at home, but I've got an urgent case for which I'd like to hire you."

Shayne said, "Sorry, Mr. Maxwell. I'm kind of wrapped up in something else right now, and I don't think I'll be taking any new cases for a few days."

"Are you sure?" Maxwell sounded disappointed. "I think you're just the man to help me. I'd like you to recover some stolen jewels. They belong to my wife, you see, and they have great sentimental value."

"I'd like to help you," Shayne said, trying to be polite and not lose his temper, "but I just can't right now."

"Tell you what," Maxwell said. "Why don't I just come up and talk it over with you? I'm down in the lobby of your building right now."

Shayne sat up, biting back the angry reply that sprang to his lips. This Maxwell was a persistent bastard —

Or maybe he had another reason for wanting to come up here.

"All right," Shayne said abruptly. "I guess you know the number of the apartment."

"Indeed I do. I'll see you shortly, Mr. Shayne. And thank you." There was a click in Shayne's ear as Maxwell hung up.

Alarm bells were ringing in Shayne's brain. Over the years, he had developed an instinct for spotting phony stories, and while it could still be fooled occasionally, it was pretty reliable. And that instinct was telling Shayne not to believe a word that Gareth Maxwell said.

A straight attempt on the girl had failed earlier. Maybe the people who were after her were trying some trickery now. Maxwell could be trying to set another attack.

Shayne rose and moved swiftly across the room, pulling the chair away from the door. The door's weight made it swing itself open about an inch. Shayne stepped away from it and slid his hand under his jacket. Smoothly, he pulled his pistol from its shoulder holster and checked it, then replaced it in its sheath. It would take Maxwell only a few minutes to ride the elevator to the second-floor apartment. Shayne's face was a taut mask as he waited.

He heard the bedroom door click open behind him and spun around. Phyllis stood there, raven hair slightly disheveled from lying down. She frowned and said, "Michael, what is it? Did I hear the phone?"

She was also totally, beautifully nude.

"*Goddam it!*" Shayne barked. "Get back in there, Phyllis, and get some clothes on! We're going to have company."

Her hand went to her mouth. "Michael! Is it those men again?"

"It might be," Shayne growled. "I don't know yet." He had to tear his eyes away from the glorious display of creamy flesh. "But I know you'll be better off waiting inside, and you'd better get dressed, just in case there's any trouble."

"All right, Michael," she said, and ducked back into the bedroom.

Shayne heaved a long sigh.

The door closed behind her, and Shayne turned back to the door leading out to the hall. Faintly, he heard the elevator arrive at the end of the corridor, then heard the doors slide shut again a few seconds later. Footsteps came down the hall. Shayne waited, his hand inside his coat, his fingers curled around the butt of his gun.

The footsteps stopped in front of the door, and there was a slight pause before he heard a hesitant knock on the panel. The voice he had heard on the phone called out, "Mr. Shayne?"

"Come on in, Maxwell," Shayne said.

The door opened slowly, and the man in the hall stepped inside. He was in his forties, a little under medium height, with dark hair and a neat little moustache. He glanced at the damage to the door facing and said, "It looks like you've had some trouble here, Mr. Shayne. You *are* Mr. Shayne?"

"That's right." Maxwell didn't seem very dangerous; he looked rather mousy, in fact. But Shayne had learned long before not to judge anyone solely on appearance. He continued, "I still don't see how I can take your case, but I guess it won't hurt to listen to what you have to say."

"Well, I appreciate that, Mr. Shayne, I surely do. Do you mind if I sit down?"

"Not at all."

Maxwell sat down on the sofa where Phyllis had been earlier, and Shayne took the armchair that had served as a doorstop. He had taken his hand out of his coat when Maxwell came in, but it still wasn't far from the gun.

Maxwell crossed his legs, dangling a foot clad in a highly polished, expensive-looking shoe. He said, "I suppose I should start at the beginning."

"That's usually a good idea," Shayne said dryly. He was having a hard time to keep from darting glances at the bedroom door. If Maxwell wasn't what he seemed, that would be a dead giveaway to Phyllis' location. Shayne hoped she had the sense to stay put.

"My wife owns some rather expensive jewelry," Maxwell was going on. "I've been lucky in business, and I'm able to give her almost anything she wants, you see. In fact, I can't think of anything right off hand that I haven't been able to give her. Anything she wants, that is."

Shayne lit another cigarette and wished Maxwell would get on with it. He was still undecided whether the man had an ulterior motive in coming here, but he was beginning to lean toward the view that the guy was merely a pest.

"Naturally, when my wife discovered that someone had gotten into her jewelry box and taken most of the valuable items, we reported the theft to the police. So far, they haven't been able to even come close to recovering the gems. Of course, we were insured, and the insurance company has been very cooperative, but still we'd like to have the original items back. Even though the company is going to pay the claim, there were items among those stolen that can never be replaced by any amount of money. That's why I'd like to hire you. I've heard that you're an excellent private detective, and I think you can recover the stolen items if anyone can. I'll pay you whatever fee you wish. And of course, if the jewelry is recovered, the insurance company won't have to pay off on it, and I'm sure they would be properly grateful to you, as well."

Maxwell was more than a pest, Shayne mused. He was a boring pest.

"I'm sorry you wasted your time coming up here, Maxwell," Shayne said. "I don't see any way I can help you right now, unless you want me to recommend some other agency."

"But I'm sure it would be a profitable case for you —"

It might be, Shayne thought, and usually he would gladly take a case like that, with its potential of a fee from two sources. But not now, not with that girl, whoever she really was, waiting in his bedroom.

"Sorry," he said, shaking his head.

"So am I," Maxwell said, shaking his head glumly. He uncrossed his legs, put his hands on his knees, and stood up. "At least let me give you one of my cards, in case you should reconsider."

"I won't," Shayne said flatly, but Maxwell reached inside his pocket anyway.

A small, nickle-plated .32 was in his hand when it came back out. Shayne said, "Oh, hell."

"Exactly," Maxwell said. "I know I'm not the most prepossessing figure in the world, Mr. Shayne, but I seem to have lulled your suspicions to sleep, at any rate."

Shayne's eyes flicked around the room. He was still between Maxwell and the door to the bedroom. Half-a-dozen feet separated him from the dapper Maxwell. It would take too long to draw his gun, but he could launch himself into a dive across that distance. The .32 didn't pack enough punch to stop him unless he was hit in just the right spot. Even if Maxwell was able to hit him, Shayne could still get the gun away from him . . .

"Michael!"

The frightened scream came from the bedroom and made him whip his head around. With a smirk on his face and in his voice, Maxwell said, "It appears my friends have arrived, Mr. Shayne."

They had to have come up the fire escape and in through the bedroom window, probably the same pair that had been after her earlier. Sounds of a struggle reached Shayne's ears, and he suddenly forgot about Maxwell being at his back with a gun. He plunged across the room toward the door.

Maxwell cried out for him to stop, but Shayne didn't pay any attention. His shoulder rammed into the door and knocked it open. The overhead light was off, but enough light entered the room through the door for Shayne to see the two burly figures holding the girl between them. He lunged at them.

One of them let go of Phyllis and turned to meet Shayne's charge. Shayne shot a sledgehammer fist at the face in the shadows, but the man blocked the blow with a forearm and tried to punch Shayne in the belly.

Maxwell ran into the room and snapped, "Get out of the way!" He tried to line up a shot at Shayne with the little pistol, but the fighting figures were swaying too much.

"Dammit!" Shayne's opponent gasped. "Gimme a hand here!"

Phyllis was still screaming. Maxwell grabbed her free arm and clamped the hand with the gun over her mouth. He ordered the other man, "Get him!"

Shayne ducked away from an uppercut and landed a punch of his own, making his foe double over in pain. A hard right cross spun him away and out of the fight. Shayne whirled to meet any new menace from the other man.

And ran into a hard-swung sap.

The weapon clipped the side of his head, sending him sideways in a slewing fall. He landed on his knees and tried to struggle back to his feet, but there were too many fireworks going off in his head. The man shifted the sap to his left hand and used his right to slam a fist into Shayne's jaw. The big redhead went over backwards, clutching futilely at the last shreds of consciousness and feeling them slip away, powerless to do anything about it.

He couldn't tell when he woke up how long a time he had spent in darkness. Pain throbbed and pulsed through his head, and it took what seemed like an hour for him to make it up to a sitting position. Shaking his head gingerly, Shayne tried to put his scattered senses back together.

When he made it to his feet, he staggered to the bathroom, ran the sink full of cold water, and plunged his face into it until it felt numb. He groped and found a towel, dried his face, and then studied his reflection in the mirror. It didn't look too bad, but there was a good-sized knot growing on the side of his head where the sap had gotten him. He fingered it, grimacing at the pain, and then walked slowly back to the bedroom. He knew it was no use looking, but he had to be sure.

It was just as he expected. Phyllis was gone.

V

SHAYNE SCOWLED AND RAN HIS FINGERS through his damp hair. He stepped into the room and looked around. Evidence of the earlier fight was visible in a couple of overturned chairs and a wadded-

up rug. But at least there was no sign of blood. The window stood open. Shayne went to it and looked out at the fire escape. Everything seemed normal outside. There was no sign that a kidnapping had taken place.

Straightening, he massaged his aching head for a moment, then wheeled and went back into the living room. He picked up the telephone and dialed a familiar number.

When Lucy's soft voice answered, he said, "It's me, Angel. There's been some trouble here."

"What is it, Michael?" she asked tightly.

"Those goons from earlier showed up again with another guy. I'm afraid they carried off the girl."

"Are you hurt, Michael?" There was sharp worry in her voice.

"Just my pride and my head," Shayne answered. "No real damage done. Listen, Angel, did that girl give you any idea of who she really was before I came in?"

"All she said was that she was . . . your wife."

"Well, that's out. There's no way that can be true. But whoever she is, she's in some kind of trouble —"

"And she came to you for help," Lucy finished. "I understand that, Michael. I want you to help her."

A rueful grin crossed Shayne's face. "I intend to. But I wish she'd given me more to go on. I don't think she knows who she is, any more than we do. And she wasn't able to tell me much before we were interrupted."

"What are you going to do now?"

"I'm not sure yet. I wanted you to know what was happening, though. I may not be at the office in the morning."

"Are you going to call the police?"

Shayne tugged gently on his earlobe. "Not just yet," he decided. "I want to do some poking around myself first."

"Let me know if I can help."

"Sure thing, Angel. And thanks."

There was a brief smile on his face as he hung up. Lucy was thrown by this business, too, but as always, she was ready to back him a hundred percent.

He fixed another drink and downed it rapidly, the jolt of the liquor helping to clear his head even more. His brow furrowed in concentration as he tried to decide on the best course of action.

Unfortunately, there didn't seem to be a lot he could do. All he really had to go on was the girl's description. He didn't know her real name or where she came from, or more importantly, why her captors had

been after her. The key to that had to lie somewhere in the past that was blotted out of her brain.

There was one possible lead, Shayne realized, but it petered out quickly. There was no Gareth Maxwell listed in any of the Miami area phone books, and a call to a phone company contact told Shayne that there were no unlisted numbers in that name, either. Either the name was a phony, or the man wasn't from Miami.

So maybe he was from out west somewhere, the direction the girl had come from. At least she claimed to have come from that direction. There was only her word to base that on, though. Shayne settled his hat carefully on his sore head and went out the busted door, leaving it ajar behind him. Maybe that was one part of her story he could check.

It took him only a few minutes to reach the downtown bus terminal. As he strode into the busy lobby, the elderly clerk at the newsstand raised a liver-spotted hand in greeting.

"Howdy, Mike," the man said. "Help you with somethin'?"

"Maybe," Shayne told him. "Have you seen a girl come through here this evening, Tom, in her early twenties, dark hair, good figure, very attractive? It would have been around an hour and a half ago, I imagine."

Tom's eyes twinkled. "You know I've still got an eye for the ladies, Mike. I seem to remember seein' one like that, but o' course I couldn't say for sure she was the one you're lookin' for."

Shayne pulled out his wallet, and Tom held up his hand. "Now wait a minute," the news dealer protested. "You know I don't charge you for anything I can help you with, lad."

"I know," Shayne said. He extracted a picture from the wallet and held it out where Tom could see it. "Is this the girl you saw?"

Tom looked at the picture and then nodded animatedly. "That's her. Is she in trouble, Mike? Is that why you're lookin' for her?"

"I'm afraid so," Shayne glanced at the picture himself as he replaced it in his wallet. He hadn't looked at it in a long time, but he always carried it with him. It had been taken on the porch of an old restored hotel in Central City, Colorado, years before, during a supposed vacation trip that had wound up becoming a murder investigation. It showed a smiling, sunlit Phyllis, the real Phyllis, and Shayne had to put it back quickly, before the memories got too strong again.

"Did you see which bus she got off?" he asked.

"Afraid not, Mike. I didn't see her until she was passing my stand here."

"Okay. Thanks, Tom."

"Anytime, Mike, you know that."

Shayne bought a paper before he left the stand, leaving a fiver on the counter to pay for it. He folded it, put it under his arm, and headed for the ticket counter.

A quick study of the schedule told him that the bus from Houston had arrived an hour and forty minutes earlier. He sought out the porter in charge of unloading the passengers' luggage from the buses and showed him the photograph.

"Yeah, I think I saw her," the man said. "Seems like it was the Houston bus she came in on. Good-looking gal, if you ask me."

"Yeah, she is," Shayne agreed. A thought occurred to him. "Do you remember what luggage she had?"

"Oh, hell, I unload so much of the stuff, I don't know . . . Let me think a minute. A little overnighter, maybe. I think that's all she had."

Shayne nodded and thanked the man. So she had lied about not having any luggage. He wondered what else she had lied about. Damn, but she had been convincing, though! The rest of her story might have been the truth, but Shayne was beginning to have his doubts.

The driver who had brought the bus in from Houston had gone home by this time, but Shayne didn't think he'd need to question the man just yet. He was inclined to believe that the girl had indeed come from Houston.

He stopped at a telephone booth and got long distance information. An operator with a Texas drawl told him that there was a Gareth Maxwell listed in Pasadena, just outside of Houston, and that there was also a Gareth Maxwell, C.P.A., with an office in downtown Houston.

Shayne was grimaced as he stepped from the booth. He had a few more facts now, but they didn't add up to anything yet. He strode past the rows of coin lockers, frowning, trying to come up with another thread in his mind that he could follow. He didn't notice the warm, gentle breezes of the early morning, or the stars that were beginning to come out overhead.

He spent the next half hour doing the only other thing he could see to do at the moment — putting out the word. Moving among the street contacts he had made over the years, he described the girl and the men who had snatched her and let it be known that he would be willing to pay for information that led to his finding them. He knew that every bartender, tout, and rummy he talked to would pass the word on to several others. It wasn't much, but it was all he could do. And you never know when somebody might see something and let him know.

Shayne pointed his Buick back toward Second Avenue and his apart-

ment. As he drove, he decided that the cops would have to be called in on this. He had been holding off on that, but it looked like he wasn't going to be able to do any good on his own. Playing a lone hand was the way he operated best, but sometimes it just didn't work out.

There was a parking place on the street, so Shayne pulled into it. The way the evening had been going, he would be out again, and if he had to leave in a hurry, this would be quicker than putting the car in the basement garage.

He stepped out of the car and locked it, then started across the sidewalk toward the entrance of the building. He had taken two steps when a figure stepped out of some shadows near the door.

"Hold it right there, Shayne," the man said.

Shayne stopped. He recognized the voice. Bunching his shoulders, he growled, "Goddammit, Maxwell, if you've hurt that girl — "

"Take it easy, Shayne. The girl's all right, at least for now. And don't try jumping me." Maxwell's head inclined toward another car at the curb. "After the way you laid him out upstairs, I'm sure Larry would be glad for an excuse to shoot you."

Shayne darted a glance toward the car. He could see a shadowy form inside it, and as he watched, the barrel of a gun poked out the side window.

"Just get in the car and don't give us any trouble," Maxwell went on. "If you do as I tell you, you just might come through this alive."

A savage grin creased Shayne's face. "You're a tough-talking bastard for an accountant," he said wryly.

Although the street was too dark to distinguish features, he saw the twitch of surprise that went through Maxwell. It was enough to confirm his guess. After a moment, Maxwell said, "Never mind that. Just get in the car like I told you."

"Sure." Shayne kept his hands in plain sight, not wanting to tempt the trigger-happy Larry, and sauntered over to the car. Maxwell opened the rear door, and Shayne slid in. Maxwell shut the door and then got in behind the wheel. Larry turned until he was sitting sideways in the front seat, with the gun trained on Shayne's bulky form.

Shayne knew that he might have been able to fight his way out of this, but he also figured that if he let them grab him, they might take him to wherever they were holding the girl. It was worth a chance, the way he saw it.

Maxwell started the car and piloted it out into the traffic. No one seemed to be paying any attention to them. The scene on the sidewalk had been deceptively tranquil. No one watching would have suspected that a kidnapping had just taken place.

"Where are we going?" Shayne asked.

"You'll find out when we get there," Maxwell said. So far, Larry had been silent. Maxwell went on, "But you can save us all a lot of time by handing it over."

So they were after some sort of object. Shayne said, "I don't know what the hell you're talking about."

"Oh, come off it, Shayne. We know you've got it. The girl must have given it to you. She didn't have it on her, and we went through your apartment before you got back and didn't find it. Thanks for leaving the door open, by the way."

"Thank Larry here. He and his friends are the ones who busted it."

Larry finally spoke. "Just like we're gonna bust you."

"Aren't you the charming one," Shayne snorted. "Listen, Maxwell, even if I do have it, why should I give it to you?"

Maxwell's eyes went to the rearview mirror and looked at Shayne. "For the best reason in the world. To save yourself some pain."

Shayne shook his head. "You'll have to do better than that. I've got to make a profit somewhere."

Maxwell made a disgusted sound. "Stubborn bastard. We'll see how you feel later."

Shayne sat back and looked out the window. They were heading west through Miami. Soon they would be hitting the Tamiami Trail, leading out through the Everglades toward Tampa. That was still desolate country, a good place to persuade someone to give up secrets.

Having a gun barrel staring at you makes thinking coolly and objectively a little difficult, but Shayne managed to do just that. He considered what Maxwell had said so far. They were after some kind of object that the girl had, and so far hadn't been able to find it. Shayne knew she hadn't given *him* anything, and if she didn't have it with her, then she must have hidden it somewhere. It could be that she hadn't had it when she arrived at the apartment, or she could have hidden it there well enough so that Maxwell and Larry didn't find it. If that was the case, it couldn't be very big. What it was, however, Shayne had no idea.

But it wouldn't do for Maxwell and Larry to know that. If they did, they might kill him out of hand, just to rid themselves of an annoyance.

They were in the fringes of Miami now, putting the city behind them. They passed a large deserted building with broken windows and a weedgrown parking lot. At one time, it had been the Wildcat, one of the area's top night spots. Once they had passed it, the signs of

civilization disappeared rapidly, except for the highway and the telephone poles beside it. A shallow canal ran along one side of the road. Occasionally, a dirt road would turn off and disappear into the marshy woods.

Maxwell turned onto one such road. The headlights of the car illuminated the muddy ruts. Maxwell had to fight the wheel a bit to control the car, and as he drove, he said, "This looks like as good a place as any, Larry. I'll stop the car, and you can get to work on Shayne."

So they weren't going to take him to the girl after all. Shayne gave a mental shrug. Most of his life had been a gamble, and he had lost his share of side bets. Now it was time to recoup his losses.

The car hit a particularly deep rut, making it bounce roughly. Shayne saw the barrel of Larry's gun tilt toward the ceiling, and he exploded into action.

His right hand reached out and fastened on the gun barrel, forcing it up even more, and his clubbed left smashed into the side of Maxwell's head. The wheel came out of the man's hands and spun wildly, sending the car slewing sideways in the road. Larry yelled and triggered a shot, the bullet smacking through the roof of the car.

Shayne bent the gun, and Larry's wrist along with it, but the man kept his grip on the weapon. Shayne slashed at his throat with his other hand while Maxwell slumped over the steering wheel, only half conscious. The accountant's foot must have been wedged on the accelerator, because the car's engine whined and pulled it off the road.

Shayne grappled with Larry as the car slid to a stop, despite its racing engine. Taking a desperate chance, Shayne let go of the gun, but before Larry could bring it into play, Shayne's elbow cracked into his jaw, snapping his head back sharply. It hit the post between the side windows, and a moan escaped Larry's lips. Shayne finished the fight with a hard left, delivered with plenty of power despite the cramped, awkward position from which he threw it.

Throwing the rear door open, Shayne stepped out into wet, slippery mud. That was what had stopped the car, bogging it down as the wheels spun; it would take a wrecker to pull the vehicle free. Shayne slogged to the other side of the car.

Maxwell was still lying over the wheel. Shayne jerked the door open and pulled the man out, letting him fall to the mud. Maxwell sputtered with returning consciousness.

He looked up a moment later to see Shayne holding the muzzle of Larry's pistol a scant three inches from his right eye. Shayne's face was set in hard lines, though Maxwell couldn't see that in the dark-

ness. He could hear the deadly intensity in Shayne's voice, though.

"Where's the girl?"

"I — I don't know!" Maxwell blubbered, terrified of the grim spectre standing over him. "I went back to search your place after you left. Larry and Roy took her somewhere, I don't know where, then Larry came back to help me. We're all just doing like we're told!"

Shayne's lips drew back from his teeth. Maxwell, for all his tough talk, was out of his element in a situation like this. The man from Houston was too scared to do anything but tell the truth. And what he said told Shayne that there was someone else behind all this, someone giving the orders.

Keeping the gun trained on Maxwell, Shayne flicked his lighter on long enough to see that Larry was still out cold. Turning back to Maxwell, he said, "I can't carry both of you back to town, and that car's not going anywhere. So I guess the two of you will have to walk back when Larry wakes up. That is, unless the cops find you first."

"You mean — you mean you're going to leave us here?"

"That's right, Maxwell, I've got things to do."

"But this is a swamp!"

Shayne grinned in the starlight. "We're only on the edge of the Everglades. There shouldn't be too many snakes and gators around here."

Maxwell struggled to his feet. His voice was panic-stricken as he said, "Take me with you! You can trust me, I won't try anything else, I promise."

"I might consider it," Shayne said carefully, "if you'll tell me who your boss is. And where the girl is."

"I told you I don't know where she is! And if I tell you who I'm working for, he'll kill me!"

Shayne was in no mood to bargain. "All right. You can stay out here, then. Or you can try to follow the road back out. But you're not going with me. Just watch where you step and you should be all right. Alligators generally don't bother people unless they're bothered first."

Shayne was tightening the screws a little tighter, playing on the fears of an urban type like Maxwell. A few more comments about snakes and gators, maybe a mention of tarantulas, and Maxwell would tell him whatever he wanted to know.

But he hadn't reckoned on Maxwell's reaction to the veiled threats. The man suddenly leaped on him, fingers hooked and clawing for his eyes. Shayne moved instinctively, with the speed of a great cat, lashing out with the gun, which hit solidly against Maxwell's temple.

Maxwell folded up in the mud, muscles limp, and didn't move. Shayne glared down at him for a second, then said violently, "Damn!"

His earlier statement had been right. He couldn't carry them. He would have to leave them there, and now he wouldn't even be able to get any information out of Maxwell. But he couldn't wait around for them to wake up. Not with the girl missing and still probably in danger. He had to get back to Miami, as quickly as possible.

Tucking Larry's gun into his belt, Shayne stepped out through the mud, and headed for the highway.

VI

CONSIDERING THE WAY THINGS HAD BEEN GOING, Shayne thought it only appropriate that he have a little good luck for a change. He got a ride only minutes after reaching the highway, and the motorist took him all the way to his apartment, looking only slightly askance at his muddy condition.

Shayne got more looks as he tramped across the lobby of his building, dried mud falling from his shoes and pants. The desk clerk caught his eye, and Shayne said with a sheepish look, "Sorry about the mess, Jack. I had a little trouble."

"I can see that," the young man said. "That's all right, Mr. Shayne. I just wanted to tell you that you've got company upstairs."

"Oh?" One of Shayne's rusty brows went up as he tried to conceal the sudden anticipation he felt. "Who is it?"

"It's Chief Gentry and Mr. Rourke. I thought it would be all right to let them wait there. By the way, we'll get that door fixed first thing tomorrow."

"That's fine, Jack." For a second, Shayne had hoped the girl had shown up again. No such luck.

When he opened the door of his apartment and stepped inside, he got puzzled stares from Will Gentry and Timothy Rourke. Gentry, the beefy Chief of Police, and Rourke, the gaunt reporter from the *Miami Daily News*, both said simultaneously, "What the hell happened to you?"

Shayne crossed to the liquor cabinet, poured a straight shot of cognac, and tossed it down. He turned to his two old friends and said, "Trouble, up one way and down the other. What are you two doing here?"

Rourke unfolded his lanky length from an armchair and said, "Will got a report from some of his boys about a shooting here earlier and tried to call you. When he couldn't locate you, he called me. I didn't

know where you were, either, so I called Lucy. She filled us in on what happened."

"We thought we'd come over here and wait for you," Gentry rumbled. "Lucy was pretty worried about you. Looks like you've been in more of a mess since then."

Rourke's deep-set eyes locked with Shayne's, and he asked, "Is what Lucy told us on the level, Mike? Is it possible for a double of Phyllis to exist?"

"It looks like it," Shayne growled.

"Do you have any line on who she really is or why those guys grabbed her?" Gentry asked.

"Not for sure," Shayne said. "I've just been waltzing with two of those boys, though. They had an idea that the girl had given me something to hold while she was here. You'll find the two of them about a mile north of the Trail, out past where the Wildcat used to be. Their car was stuck in the mud, and they were both out cold when I left them there."

Gentry stood up and said, "Dammit, Mike, why didn't you bring us in on this from the first? Why the hell do you insist on being a lone wolf?"

Shayne stalked over to the window and stared out at the lights of Miami. "I'm no cop, Will," he said flatly. "I like to do things my own way. All this business has got me kind of shook up, I don't mind telling you. It was too personal to just turn all of it over to you."

Rourke came up beside the big detective and said, "What about the girl, Mike? *Did* she give you anything while she was here?"

Shayne shook his red head. "Not that I know of. By the way, Will, I did find out that the girl came in on the bus from Houston earlier this evening. That's all I've been able to come up with, though."

If pressed, he wouldn't have been able to tell why he held back Gareth Maxwell's name and the man's Houston connection. Maybe it was because he wanted to be the one to find the girl who seemed to be his wife come back to life. Maybe he felt that was his right. And maybe he was just mad, mad at the whole painful, frustrating situation. Shayne snorted and stopped the futile speculations. Regardless of why, he knew that he wanted desperately to be the one to break this case.

He swung from the window and said, "Thanks for coming by. I'd appreciate it if you'll let me know if you come up with anything, Will."

Gentry stuck the butt of an unlit cigar in his mouth. "Sure. And you could return that favor, you know."

Rourke held up his hands. "Wait a minute. There's a story here."

"There's also a tired, muddy shamus here," Shayne said, "who wants to soak in a hot tub for a while. Don't worry, Tim; I'll be in touch. Now out, both of you."

"You'd treat the Chief of Police like that?" Rourke asked.

"Damn right." Shayne saw the barest trace of a smile on Gentry's face.

He ushered both of them out, Rourke still grouching halfheartedly about the freedom of the press, then headed wearily toward the bathroom after blocking the door again. While the scalding water was running into the tub, he lit a cigarette and spent a moment in reflection.

The girl who called herself Phyllis Shayne had been alone in the bedroom for a while tonight, and if she had hidden anything, that was the most likely place for it to be. And it would have to be well hidden, if Maxwell and Larry hadn't been able to find it during their search of the place. Shayne strolled into the bedroom and looked around. He pulled open the drawer of the night table. There was nothing there that shouldn't have been, but something was missing that should have been there — his .32, the one that Lucy had used to scare off the intruders. All he saw was cigarettes, a lighter, a notebook and pen, and a ring of keys that he sometimes used to open doors that he shouldn't have had a key to.

He stalked back into the living room and looked around. A few minutes later, he had to admit that the .32 was nowhere to be found. One of the several people who had been in and out of here tonight must have carried it off. It wasn't small enough to be hidden just anywhere, and a gun doesn't blend in with its surroundings unless it's with a bunch of other guns, so it had to be gone.

Shayne's eyes suddenly narrowed. Thinking about where the gun might be hidden had given him an idea on an entirely different subject. It was an idea hoary with age, but it had always worked. Shayne hurried back into the bedroom, his bath forgotten momentarily.

He opened the drawer in the night table again and pulled out the ring of keys. There were at least a couple of dozen on it, but he was familiar with all of them except one. That one was slightly smaller than the others, though not noticeably so, and it had a number stamped on one side. Shayne recognized it for what it was immediately —

A key to one of the coin-operated lockers at the bus station!

VII

SHAYNE BALLED HIS FIST, THE KEY CLUTCHED INSIDE IT.

Finding it was a small triumph, but a triumph nonetheless. The way this night had been going, Shayne was glad to take what he could get.

He carried the key back into the bathroom with him and put it on the sink while he shut the bath water off. He wasn't going to let it out of his sight until he opened the locker it belonged to and saw what was inside.

The girl must have put the key there, and the key had to be what Maxwell and Larry were after. They had missed it during their search because it was on the ring with the other keys. Shayne was sure of that, and he was equally sure that the girl must have left her overnighter in the locker.

What was in the overnighter was another question.

Shayne would hopefully have the answer to that question before long. A good long soak was out — he would never have the patience for it now — but there was quite a bit of mud on him that needed to come off. Shayne tossed his grubby clothes in the corner as he stripped them off, then lowered himself into the hot water. The bath was a quick one, and fifteen minutes later, he was dressed again and ready to go, with the locker key in his pocket.

He debated calling Lucy, then decided not to. With any luck he might have the answers to this puzzle before long, and then he could give her the whole story.

Settling his hat on his unruly red hair, Shayne was heading for the door when he heard a tentative tapping on it. He stopped and called out, "Yeah? Who is it?"

An unfamiliar male voice replied, "Mr. Shayne? I'd like to see you on a business matter. My name is Philip Quentin."

Shayne slid his gun out of its holster and trained it on the door. Maxwell had played him for a sucker already tonight. This newcomer wasn't going to do the same thing.

"I'm too busy for any new cases," Shayne growled. "I can't help you."

There was a moment of silence from outside, then the man who called himself Quentin said, "It's my wife, Mr. Shayne. She's gone, and you've got to help me find her." Shayne could hear the anxiety in the man's voice.

"Sorry, Quentin," he said.

He heard a muffled conversation outside the door, but he couldn't make out any of the words. The other voice, arguing with Quentin, seemed to be female.

After a moment of discussion, Quentin said through the door,

"Couldn't we at least come in and talk it over with you, Mr. Shayne?"

Shayne cursed inwardly. He wasn't sure that Quentin was on the level, but even if he was, he was causing delay. Shayne wanted to get to the bus station and check out that locker, and anything that held him back chafed. He said, "All right, just a minute."

Keeping his gun out, he shoved aside the chair with a foot, then backed up several feet. He said, "All right, Quentin, you can come in, but come in slow."

The door was pushed open tentatively, and a man put his head around the edge of it to peer into the apartment. His eyes widened when he saw Shayne standing there grim-faced, gun out. He said hurriedly, "Don't shoot!"

"Get in here," Shayne snapped irritably. "If you're on the level, you don't have anything to worry about. I told you I'm busy now; the case I'm on isn't a peaceful one."

Quentin stepped into the room slowly. He was in his early forties, Shayne judged, with dark hair, a thin face, and rather pale skin. He looked back over his shoulder and said, "Come on in, Martha. It's all right . . . I think."

The woman who followed Quentin into the apartment was middle-aged with dyed blond hair, a frumpy figure, and a doughy face. She clutched her purse nervously and tried to smile at Shayne. The smile evaporated when she saw the gun.

"All right," Shayne said. "You're inside. Now what's this all about?"

Quentin licked his lips and said, "As I told you, my name is Philip Quentin. This is my mother-in-law, Martha Neuman. We've come about my wife, Felicia."

"You said she was missing?"

"Yes. For nearly a week now."

"What makes you think she's in Miami?" Shayne still wasn't sure these two were who they claimed to be, but they didn't seem to want to sap him or shoot him, like nearly everybody else had this evening.

"Well, you see, I hired a private detective back home," Quentin was going on, "and he traced her to the bus station, and he found out that she boarded a bus that was bound for Miami. Of course, she could have gotten off anywhere along the way, but we've traced the route of the bus and haven't found any sign of her yet."

Shayne's eyes had narrowed. He said quietly, "Where's back home?"

"Why, we're from Houston. Is that important?"

"You never know," Shayne said brusquely. "I'm starting to get

interested in your story. Go on."

"What else is there to tell? I want to hire you to find my wife, if she's in Miami. We made inquiries when we arrived this evening and were told that you have a good reputation as a private detective."

Shayne let the barrel of his gun droop slightly, enough to tempt them if they were interested in jumping him. They didn't take advantage of the opportunity, and after a moment, Shayne said, "There's a lot more to tell. Why did your wife leave you in the first place? Did the two of you have an argument?"

Quentin shook his head. Worried lines were etched into his face. "No, nothing like that. You see, Felicia may not be herself . . . I mean, she may not know who she is. She was in an auto accident, and she just . . . wandered away. I — I'm afraid she may have amnesia, Mr. Shayne."

Unconsciously, Shayne's hand had gone up to tug gently at his earlobe. This was no coincidence, and Shayne had been around long enough to doubt the existence of such things anyway, at least most of the time.

He said, "I suppose you brought a picture of your wife with you?"

"Of course." Quentin reached into an inside pocket, and he seemed too distracted to notice the way that the barrel of Shayne's gun tilted up again. He brought out a photograph and held it out toward Shayne.

Shayne took it, still being careful not to get too close to Quentin, then took a step backward before he looked at the picture. He kept his face calm and emotionless as he studied it.

There was no mistaking it. Felicia Quentin was the girl who had come bursting into his life earlier this evening, claiming to be Phyllis. Shayne might not have believed it before, but now he had to admit grudgingly that maybe there was such a thing as exact doubles.

He said, "You mind if I keep this?"

Quentin shook his head. "Not at all. That's why I brought it. Does that mean you'll take the case after all?"

"I think I might."

Martha Neuman, Felicia's mother, had been silent so far, but now she stepped forward suddenly and said, "You've got to find her, Mr. Shayne. It — it means the world to me."

Shayne could clearly see the fear and nervousness on her broad face. As she stepped closer, he caught a whiff of some pungent odor and realized that it was the woman's perfume. It was an unusual scent, to say the least.

He said, "I'll do my best to find her, Mrs. Neuman. You can count on that."

"I suppose you'll want a retainer," Quentin said. "I can write you a check."

"That's fine," Shayne replied. "How does a thousand sound to you?"

"Let's make it two," Quentin replied, scribbling furiously. "Money is no object, Mr. Shayne. I just want Felicia back." He tore out the check and handed it to Shayne. "Now, since that's settled, do you suppose you could put the gun away?"

Shayne grinned and pointed the gun at the floor. "I guess I'm just in the habit of being careful. I'll get to work on this right away."

"Thank you," Mrs. Neuman said, relief showing on her face and in her voice. "You don't know what it'll mean to me if you find Felicia."

Quentin said, "We're staying at the Biscayne Hotel. You'll let me know immediately if you get any leads on Felicia?"

"Of course," Shayne assured him.

"Well . . . I suppose that's about all, then. Come along, Martha."

The two of them started toward the door, when Shayne stopped them by saying, "By the way, Quentin, do you know a man named Gareth Maxwell?"

Quentin looked back at Shayne, and the flicker of something in his eyes was almost imperceptible. Almost, but not quite.

"Gareth Maxwell?" Quentin mused. "No, I don't believe I know the man. Why do you ask?"

"Just a fellow I know who's from Houston," Shayne said off-handedly. "I thought you might know him."

"Afraid not. Well, good night, Mr. Shayne."

"Good night," Shayne grunted.

He stood there and waited until he heard them walk down the hall and board the elevator. Then he snorted and said out loud, "Who the hell is fooling who?"

VIII

SHAYNE'S MIND WAS RACING. He didn't know if Quentin and Mrs. Neuman had been telling the truth about Felicia or not, but one thing was sure. They hadn't told him *all* the truth. There had to be more to the story. Felicia Quentin was convinced that she was really Phyllis Shayne, and there had to be a reason for that delusion. Also, Shayne was sure that Quentin had recognized Gareth Maxwell's name.

He frowned and worried at his earlobe as he stood there. Maxwell had hinted at a boss, someone who gave him orders. Could that someone be Philip Quentin?

Shayne felt like a mouse in a maze. He knew there was a way through, a way that would get him to the answers, if only he could find it in time.

Maybe Quentin could show him the way through the maze. Shayne started toward the door. Quentin and Mrs. Neuman had a big enough lead. There was time for him to hurry downstairs and take up their trail. Whatever was in that bus station locker would keep.

He was only a step away from the door when the telephone rang. He halted, hand outstretched toward the knob. The phone shrilled again.

There was a possibility that Quentin might lead him to the girl. But there was also a possibility that the phone call might be something important. He had put the word out with a lot of people about the girl, and this could be one of them calling. Shayne made up his mind abruptly. He wheeled, stalked across the room, and jerked the receiver from its cradle.

"Shayne here," he grunted into it.

For a moment, the person on the other end didn't say anything, but Shayne could hear the soft sibilance of breathing. Then, "Are you that private dick who's looking for a girl?"

"Maybe," Shayne said noncommittally.

"A real good-lookin' girl — young, dark hair?"

"Maybe," Shayne said again. He had had many dealings with informers over the years, and he knew that they were usually paranoid as well as mercenary. He didn't want to scare this one off, if indeed the man knew anything.

"Listen, Shayne," the husky voice said. "If you want to know about the girl, you come over to Gilly's, on the Beach. Bring a C-note and ask for Alvin."

"Sure," Shayne agreed. "I'll be there in twenty minutes." He hung up and heaved a long sigh. Quentin and Mrs. Neuman would have too large a lead now for him to follow them. So he would have to hang his hopes on an unknown factor, Alvin. Some leads had paid off before for him, but others had turned out to be busts. He would make sure that the man really had some information before he forked over the hundred dollars.

Shayne put his hand in his pocket, felt the reassuring presence of the locker key, and left the apartment. His Buick was still parked on the street where he had left it earlier, before his abduction by Maxwell and Larry. He pointed it toward the Beach.

The evening was well advanced by now, and traffic was fairly light on the causeway spanning Biscayne Bay. Shayne made good time and arrived at Gilly's about fifteen minutes after leaving his apartment,

which made him a little early.

Gilly's was a small bar several blocks from the ocean, in a neighborhood that had once been good but was now starting to look seedy. Shayne hadn't been to the bar in years, but it was right where he remembered it. Across the street was the Avalon Hotel, which had also seen better days. Shayne parked down the block from the bar and strolled down the sidewalk to the entrance.

The bar was quiet and peaceful inside. The patrons were a mix of lethargic drunks, down at heels gamblers and touts, and couples who couldn't find a better place for their assignations. Shayne nodded to the tired-looking bartender and said, "I'm looking for Alvin."

"The back booth," the bartender told him, pointing with a nod of his head.

"Thanks. I'll have a shot of Martell, if you've got it."

The man smiled. "You've got to be kidding."

"The best you've got, then."

Shayne sipped the cognac the bartender poured for him, refrained from making a face, and dropped a bill on the bar. Leaving the drink there as well, he headed for the back booth and slid into it across the table from Alvin.

The man was thin and wearing a suit that had seen better days, just like his surroundings. Shayne said, "Alvin? I'm Mike Shayne. You called me a little while ago."

"That's right," Alvin nodded. "Did you bring the money?"

Shayne had put a hundred dollar bill in his pocket. He brought it out now, keeping it folded and in his hand, but he let the corner of it show plainly. Alvin's eyes lit up. His fingers began to tremble.

"All right," Shayne said softly. "It's yours, if you help me. Now give."

"This girl you're looking for, I think I saw her a little while ago. You see, I been in here all evening, and I heard a couple people talking about how you got the word out on her. So a little while ago, you see, I'm up at the front, buying some cigarettes out of the machine, and I look out the window. I see a car pull up in front of the Avalon, you know, across the street?"

"I know," Shayne said.

"Two guys get out, and they've got this pretty young girl with 'em, and while they're not really dragging her, she acts like she don't want to go with them."

"Describe the men," Shayne said flatly.

"They was big and burly, rough types, you know, wearing kinda flashy clothes."

Shayne's fingers tightened on the bill. Alvin had just described Larry and his partner. With his other hand, he took out the photo of Felicia Quentin that her husband had given him and laid it on the table. "Was this the girl?" he asked.

Alvin studied the picture for a few seconds, then nodded. "I think so. Course, it was kinda dark in the street, so I couldn't swear a hundred percent, but it looks like her."

"And they went in the hotel?"

"That's right. I was sort of interested, on account of the girl, you know, even though I didn't know you was looking for her then. One of the guys came back out a little later and left. I didn't see the girl no more."

It was Larry, Shayne knew, on his way to help Maxwell search his apartment and then grab him. He wondered momentarily if they had made it out of the marshes.

He relaxed his hold on the hundred dollar bill and let it drop on the table. Alvin's watery eyes lit up even more, and his spindly arm shot out, his fingers closing over it.

Shayne stood up. "Thanks, Alvin. I think you've been a great help to me. Now do yourself a favor. Spend that on something besides fifty bottles of wine."

"Oh, I will, Mr. Shayne, you bet."

Shayne nodded to the bartender again on his way out, then pushed through the door and stepped onto the sidewalk. He cut across the street in the middle of the block and headed for the entrance of the Avalon Hotel. He hoped wryly that there were no cops around to see him cross the street. This was Peter Painter's bailiwick, and the diminutive police chief held a lot of grudges against him. He'd probably prosecute even a jay-walking charge.

The lobby of the Avalon Hotel bespoke an elegance of another day, with its potted palms, embossed wallpaper, and chandeliers. The fact that it was all covered with a thin patina of dust took something away from the image, though. A sleepy-eyed night clerk leaned on the counter in front of the keyboard. He looked at Shayne with only slight interest as the redhead walked up to the counter.

"I'm looking for a girl," Shayne said bluntly.

"This ain't that kind of hotel," the clerk said, "Not yet, anyway. Try us again in a year or so."

In earlier years, Shayne might have given in to his temper, reached across the counter, and jerked the clerk off his feet. He had mellowed a little over the years, though . . .

What the hell, he thought. This whole case had forced him to relive

a lot of the past. His long arm shot out, his fingers tangled in the man's none too clean collar, and he pulled the suddenly terrified clerk nearly all the way across the counter.

"Don't even think about mouthing off again," Shayne said, quietly, dangerously. "Two men and a girl came in here a while ago. What room are they in?"

The clerk's eyes were wide and staring. "I — I don't know what you're talking about!" he gasped.

With his free hand, Shayne slapped the photograph down on the desk. "That's the girl," he growled. "Now which room? Whatever they paid you to clam up, it won't be worth getting me mad."

"A-all right! They're in 207. But don't tell them I told you!"

Shayne let him go. The clerk slid back behind the desk and leaned on it for support. "Don't worry," Shayne said. "You'll be safe enough." He paused. "Unless you try to call up there and tell them I'm coming. Then you won't be safe at all."

He turned his back on the shaken clerk and stalked across the lobby, bypassing the ancient elevator and taking the stairs two at a time. A moment later, he was striding down the faded carpet runner of the second floor hall, looking for the door to Room 207.

It was near the end of the hall. Shayne paused in front of the door and listened intently for a moment. There didn't seem to be any sound from inside. He assumed that there was at least one man inside, the one left to guard the girl while Maxwell and Larry tried to come up with the key. Of course, they must not have known it was a key they were looking for. More than likely, Shayne thought, they had been after the overnighter that he felt sure was in the locker.

The door didn't look too sturdy. Shayne stepped back from it, pulled his gun from its holster, and suddenly launched himself across the hall, slamming into the door with his shoulder.

The latch gave, popping the door open, and Shayne went through it in a falling dive. He landed on hands and knees, gun up and ready, eyes flicking from side to side.

The place was empty.

The room was furnished shabbily, with a bed, two chairs, and a scarred writing desk. It had held more furniture at one time in its life, but the other pieces had been moved out as the hotel deteriorated. There was a closed door on one wall. Shayne stood up and approached it carefully.

He tried the knob gingerly and pushed the door open slowly. It only moved about a foot and a half before some obstruction stopped it.

The door was open enough for Shayne to see inside the room. It was

a bathroom, with a tile floor, and Shayne could see a red puddle on the floor. The thing blocking the door was a foot.

A man's foot.

Shayne put his head inside the door, looked around, and cursed. The third man, the one who had been with Maxwell and Larry earlier, was sprawled on the bathroom floor, clutching at his belly. Shayne could see the huge red stain under his hands. The man's face was contorted in an expression of agony. Death had not come easy to him.

There was a pistol lying on the floor just inside the door. Shayne recognized it immediately. It was his .32, the gun that normally reposed inside the drawer of his night table. Wrapping his hand in his handkerchief, Shayne knelt, reached into the room, and picked it up. One sniff of the muzzle told him that it had been fired recently.

He straightened with it, face set in hard lines. There was only one conclusion to draw. He started wiping the gun briskly. It was unlikely that the police could get any usable prints off the butt of it, but the cylinder and the barrel would be a different story. He stuffed the handkerchief back in his pocket and held the gun tightly by the butt.

"Drop it, Shayne!" a voice cracked from behind him.

Shayne stood stock still for a long moment, then sighed and turned slowly. A familiar figure was crouched in the doorway, with several blue-uniformed officers behind him. The newcomer was short and dapper, and his thin moustache fairly bristled with hostility toward Shayne.

"Standing over the body with a gun in your hand!" Chief Peter Painter crowed. "You won't weasel out of this one, Shayne!"

Shayne smiled grimly and held out the gun toward Painter. "Yeah, and it's even my gun, Petey. Now how about telling me how you know about this?"

Painter motioned his men forward. They disarmed Shayne quickly, and one of them moved to snap handcuffs on him, until he saw the look in Shayne's eyes and backed off.

Painter strutted into the room, took quick look at the corpse, then turned to Shayne triumphantly and said, "No, I don't mind telling you, shamus. We got an anonymous tip saying that you were here and had just killed a man. Got a smart reply to that?"

Shayne shook his head. "No. I would like to point out to you, though, that the deceased in there was shot in the belly. A paraffin test is going to prove that I haven't fired a gun all night long."

Some of the light went out of Painter's eyes. He snapped, "You're not going to pull anything like that, Shayne. I'm warning you."

"I'm not trying to pull anything. I'm talking about a matter of physical evidence. I can prove I didn't pull the trigger on that guy."

"Well . . . you'll still have to come downtown with me," Painter blustered.

"Glad to. Let's get it over with. You can run the paraffin test right away."

"You mean you're cooperating?"

"Shocked, Petey?" Shayne's mouth curved in a grin, but there was no smile in his eyes.

Painter issued orders to his men to stay on the scene until the technical crews arrived, then nodded curtly to Shayne. "Let's go, Shayne. You're not officially under arrest, but I'd advise you not to try anything."

"I won't. I've got better things to do, better things than putting up with your fantasies of nailing my hide to the wall. There's just one thing." Shayne's grey eyes bored into Painter's. "This anonymous tip you got . . . Was it from a man or woman?"

Painter frowned. "A woman, I think. Why?"

"Just trying to figure out who's trying to frame me."

As he said it, Shayne's face was grim. He was thinking about the woman who had been with Quentin, the woman who called herself Martha Neuman, who wore an unusual perfume . . .

IX

SHAYNE STALKED OUT OF MIAMI BEACH HEADQUARTERS an hour and a half later, free but frustrated. The technicians in the police lab unequivocally cleared him of the murder, telling a furious Peter Painter that there was no way Shayne could have fired the fatal shots. The tests had been necessary to keep him out of jail, but still the time had slipped by, and the girl, whether her real name was Felicia Quentin or not, was still missing.

Shayne picked up his Buick at the municipal garage and put Miami Beach behind him. It was nearly midnight as he crossed the Bay. The bus terminal in downtown Miami was still brightly lighted and busy, though. It never slept.

He was lucky enough to find a parking place at the curb right outside. Pushing through the glass doors into the station, Shayne headed directly for the rows of lockers. He took the key out of his pocket and confirmed the number. It took him only a second to find the matching locker.

It was in the middle of a row, on the bottom. Shayne put the key in

the lock, twisted it, and swung the door open.

A Scotch plaid overnight bag rested peacefully in the locker.

Shayne grasped the handle of it and hefted it. It wasn't very heavy, and he lifted it out of the locker nonchalantly, as if he were the owner, come to reclaim it. Swinging the bag slightly, he strolled out of the terminal, a traveler on his way home.

His curiosity was fairly bursting by the time he got back in the Buick. The bag was locked, but he had the catches open in less than a minute with his pocketknife. He lifted the lid carefully, in case it was booby-trapped, and saw what he expected to see.

Money.

Money was at the heart of most his cases, and this one was no different. The bills were arranged in neat rows, bundled with a paper wrapper around each bundle. Shayne picked up one of them, riffled through it, and calculated. The bills were fifty and hundreds, and his quick tally showed a little more than a hundred thousand dollars. Enough motive for almost anything.

The corners of Shayne's mouth quirked up in a grin. He had what everyone else wanted now. Now maybe he could make some progress on this case.

With the smile still on his face, he headed back toward his apartment. The first thing he had to do was stash this loot where it would be safe. Then he could take the facts he knew and try to make some sense out of them.

He left his car on the street again and went into the lobby of his building, where he put the bag up on the desk in front of the night clerk.

"How about putting this in the safe for me, Jack?"

"Sure, Mr. Shayne." The clerk took the bag and put it behind the counter, then pulled a slip of paper out of a cubby-hole. "There's a message for you."

Shayne unfolded the paper and read, "Miss Hamilton called and asked you to call her as soon as possible. Said it was urgent."

Shayne glanced up at the clerk. "When did this call come in?"

"Nearly an hour ago. She sounded mighty worried. Rough case. Mr. Shayne?"

The big redhead nodded. "Yeah, Jack. Rough as a cob."

He hurried up to his apartment, then went through the broken door carefully, just in case someone else had invited himself in. The place was deserted, though, so Shayne went directly to the telephone and dialed Lucy's number.

More and more wrinkles appeared on his brow as the rings piled up

on the other end. He cradled the receiver after listening to it burr thirty times.

It wasn't like Lucy to leave a message like that and then not be there to answer his call. It could be that she had just wanted to check on how the case was going, whether Shayne had found the girl yet or not, but it could also be something else. Shayne tugged at his earlobe and scowled.

He flipped his hat on the table, then poured himself a drink. Sprawling in his favorite chair, he lit a cigarette, then sat nursing the smoke and the drink as he tried to put the pieces together in his head.

Deja vu . . . That was the expression he was looking for. This whole business fairly reeked of it. Almost everything that had happened tonight seemed to be a replay of something that had happened before, beginning, of course, with the uncanny resemblance between the girl and Phyllis. But Shayne also remembered another case that had revolved around some stashed loot, like the hundred grand in the over-nighter. And the more he thought about it, the more he seemed to see something familiar in Martha Neuman. Maybe it was that old-fashioned powerful perfume she wore . . .

Shayne said, "Oh, my God."

There had been a woman involved in that other case. The one where everyone had been after the pieces of a baggage claim check, a check that was needed to reclaim a package full of stolen money. That woman had been young and beautiful then, and she had worn heliotrope perfume, a scent he hadn't smelled in years — at least not until tonight.

And Shayne had sent that woman to prison for murder.

No wonder it all seemed so familiar! Shayne sat up straight, drink and cigarette forgotten, as he remembered a lovely blonde named Helen Morgan, who had thought she could wrap him around her little finger and persuade him to let her get away with murder.

Helen would know what Phyllis looked like. In fact, she had been responsible for one of the worst nights of Shayne's life, when Phyllis had been kidnapped as part of the plan to regain the missing money.*

Deep trenches appeared in Shayne's lean cheeks. The theory spinning through his head was a wild one, but assuming that at least some of the things he had been told tonight were true, it would explain things. And if he was right, the girl *and Lucy* might be in deadly danger right now.

Shayne surged to his feet, grabbed his hat, and headed for the door. He had taken three steps before he stopped suddenly, his face even grimmer than before. Realization hit him that he couldn't go charging

out of here like a maddened bull. If he was out running around, there would be no way to contact him. The people on the other side knew this number, he was sure of that, and they might know by now that he had the money, in which case they would be calling to set up a meeting. There was nothing he could do for the moment but wait.

He picked up his forgotten drink and downed it rapidly. Every minute was going to be an eternity from now on.

The phone rang, jarring him.

Shayne snatched it up and barked, "Yeah?"

"Mike?" Shayne recognized Will Gentry's voice. "We found that car you told me about, but there weren't two guys with it."

"I expected as much," Shayne grunted, his nerves still jangling. "I would have brought them with me, but they were both out cold, and I didn't feel like carrying them."

"I heard you ran into a little trouble over in Painter's territory."

"Yeah, Petey thought he had me all wrapped up for a killing. I almost hated to disappoint him, he was so eager."

"You better watch your step with him, Mike —"

"Listen, Will," Shayne cut in, unable to control his impatience any longer, "this case may be breaking any minute, and I need this line clear, okay?"

"Dammit, why didn't you say so? Can I help you any way?"

"I'll let you know. So long, Will." Shayne hung up before Gentry could say anything else.

Shayne took a deep breath and stared at the phone. There was a fine film of sweat on his forehead. If he had believed in such things, he would have been willing the phone to ring with all the power in his head.

Ten minutes that seemed like ten years went by. When the telephone finally rang, Shayne's nerves were so taut that he jerked in his chair. He had been accused of having ice water in his veins, but anyone who saw him now would know different.

He let the phone finish its first ring, then picked it up and said as calmly as possible, "Shayne here."

The voice he had been expecting to hear said, "This is Philip Quentin, Mr. Shayne. There's no need for a pretense this time, is there? *You* know that I have the two young ladies, and *I* know that you have my money."

"And you want to trade?"

"That's right. The cash for the girls. We're all in my suite at the Biscayne Hotel. You can come right over, can't you?"

"What's to stop me from calling the cops and telling them where you

are?" Shayne asked.

A sudden note of savagery tinted Quentin's voice. "Because you know that if you do, I'll kill both of them. I want that money back, Shayne, but if you're determined to keep it, you'll have to pay the price."

"And how do I know you won't have your goons blow us all away when I get there?" Shayne didn't see any point in denying that he had the money, not this late in the game.

Quentin chuckled. "I guess you'll just have to trust me."

Shayne knew better than that, but it seemed he had no choice. All he could do was go to the hotel and try to make sure that Quentin's trap didn't snare him. It would take some fast thinking and some even faster action . . .

"I'll be there in ten minutes," Shayne said.

"We'll be waiting."

Shayne put the phone down. He stood up, feeling the tension in his body, stronger now than it had been before the call. He ran a hand over his face briefly. Nearly his whole adult life had been spent skating on the edge of danger, from the oilfields and seacoasts of Texas and Mexico to the treacherous pathways of the criminal underworld. But he couldn't recall ever running across such a devious and vicious turn of events as the one that had engulfed him on this warm evening. He could feel anger inside himself, anger such as he had only rarely known. He had killed out of necessity before in his violent life; this night, he was ready to kill for pleasure!

He took another deep breath and beat those emotions down. Giving in to them would only make him reckless, and a clear head was what he needed now. He slapped his hat on his red hair, checked the rounds in his gun, and left the apartment, pausing downstairs to retrieve the overnighter from the safe. The clerk returned it to him with a curious look on his face, but Shayne's expression kept him from asking any questions.

There was one more thing Shayne had to do. He opened the trunk of his car, removed several items from it, and pulled away from the curb, heading for the Biscayne Hotel and a probable appointment with death.

X

TEN MINUTES LATER, Shayne was riding up in the elevator to the fifth floor of the Biscayne. The desk clerk downstairs had told him that Mr. Quentin's party was in Suite 501. The bag hung from Shayne's

hand, and his face was set in tight lines. There were no other passengers in the elevator at this time of night. Shayne glanced at his watch. The new day was nearly an hour old.

The numbers above the door told him that he had arrived at the fifth floor. The doors slid open smoothly. He stepped out into the wide hall, with its thick carpet and sedate lighting. The elevator doors closed behind him.

Suite 501 was several yards down the hall. Shayne stalked directly to it and raised his hand. His knuckles rapped sharply on the thick panel.

It opened almost immediately. Philip Quentin stood there, a slight smile on his pale face. He stepped back, swept his hand in an ushering gesture, and said, "Come in, Mr. Shayne. We'll get right to business."

"Yeah," Shayne said as he stepped into the suite; "let's do that."

Quentin's eyes fastened on the bag, and Shayne could see the avarice in them. He stopped just inside the door and looked around the room, fixing the scene in his mind.

Quentin stood to his right, and directly in front of him, sitting on a plush sofa, were Lucy and the girl who was in all likelihood *neither* Phyllis Shayne *nor* Felicia Quentin. Standing at either end of the sofa were Gareth Maxwell and Larry. Both of them held guns pointing in Shayne's general direction. Behind the sofa, near the door leading to the rest of the suite, was the woman who had called herself Martha Neuman.

Shayne turned his attention to the girls and asked quietly, "Are you all right, Angel?"

His eyes were locked with Lucy's as he said it.

"Yes, Michael, we're both fine. They haven't hurt us."

"That's right, Shayne," Quentin put in. "I'm glad you decided to be reasonable, finally, before someone else got hurt."

Maxwell and Larry were both bruised, and they were both glaring at Shayne. He ignored them, turning his gaze on the older woman, and said, "Hello, Helen. I think we've got you to thank for all this."

Her eyes widened in shock. "You knew?" she gasped.

"I figured it out. You're still wearing the same perfume. I'll bet you have it specially made these days."

"I never thought you'd recognize me."

"I almost didn't. Prison really aged you," Shayne said bluntly. He was rewarded by a flash of hatred in her eyes.

"I look twice as old as I really am," she spat, "and it's all your fault."

"You had a little to do with it," Shayne said coldly. "You killed two men, if I remember right."

"All right," Quentin snapped. "That's enough discussion. Let's have the money, Shayne."

Shayne took a step backwards as Quentin reached for the bag. He said, "Wait a minute. Don't be grabby, Quentin. You'll get the bag. But there's a few things I want to know first."

"You're in no position to bargain."

"Maybe not, but satisfy my curiosity, all right?"

Quentin considered for a moment, then said, "All right. What can it hurt? What do you want to know?"

Shayne looked at Helen Morgan again. He asked, "Who's the girl, Helen?"

Helen waved a hand in dismissal. "She's not important. She's just a hooker who used to work for me in Houston."

The girl's eye had been downcast, but now she jerked her head up and cried, "That's not true! I'm Phyllis Shayne! You know that, don't you, Michael?"

Helen snorted. "Forget it, dear. I know you may not remember it, but you're no more Phyllis Shayne than I."

"Let me get this straight," Shayne said. "You came up with the plan, didn't you, Helen?"

"That's right," she said, pride showing on her doughy face. "I spent years hating you, Shayne. My looks were gone when I got out of prison, and I drifted around, dirt poor, for a long time before I wound up in Houston. Philip gave me a job, though, put me in charge of one of his houses. That's where I found the girl."

"And you saw that she looked something like Phyllis," Shayne guessed.

"A lot like Phyllis. That gave me the idea," Helen went on. The girl tried to deny it again, but the older woman overrode her. "She was willing to do anything I told her to, of course, as long as the money was good. So she went through some minor plastic surgery to increase the resemblance, and then I trained her good, too."

"It's a lie!" the girl exclaimed. "She's making it all up, Michael!"

Shayne shook his head slowly. "I don't think so. What was the idea, Helen?"

Helen Morgan's lips drew back from her teeth in a grimace. "The idea was to put you through hell, you bastard, by making you think that your Phyllis had come back from the grave. She was to be the instrument of your death, Shayne, and it would have worked if she hadn't gotten cold feet when I told her she had to kill you!"

Shayne's face could have been carved out of granite. He said, "So she backed out and took off, taking a pile of your boss' money with her. And of course. Quentin went after her."

Helen laughed, but it wasn't a pleasant sound. "The little bitch thought she could get away. She cracked her car up not ten miles from Houston."

"Then that much of Quentin's story was true."

"Yes, it was true," Quentin snapped. "I suppose she really does have amnesia. Lord knows, she came right to you, and she wouldn't have done that if all of her preparation with Helen hadn't made her believe she really is your wife."

"You took up her trail, you and Helen and your goons and Maxwell, your bookkeeper," Shayne said. "After a while, you realized that she was heading for Miami. With this." Shayne hefted the bag. "We went through all this uproar and a man died, all for some proceeds from your prostitution setup in Texas. That's dirty money if I've ever seen any, Quentin."

"But it's mine," Quentin growled. "Now hand it over, Shayne."

Shayne shook his head. "I want the girls over here with me before I let go of it."

Quentin nodded. "All right. Ladies, if you'll move over to this side of the room."

Lucy and the girl stood up and hurried over to Shayne. Lucy stood beside him quietly, but the girl clutched his free arm and said, "Oh, Michael, I knew you'd save me."

Shayne glanced down at her, feeling a pang of suppressed emotion deep inside him, then turned to Lucy. "What happened, Angel?" he asked softly.

"She showed up at my apartment earlier," Lucy answered. "She was looking for you and for a place to hide. I tried to call you, but you weren't home. The others showed up and grabbed us not long after."

"We knew the girl wasn't at your place, Shayne," Quentin said. "Helen and I went there with that phony story just to check it out. Maxwell was the one who suggested we check your secretary's place, after he and Larry got back from the swamp where you left them."

Maxwell tried to look angry at Shayne and proud of himself at the same time.

"I've been polite about this so far," Quentin said, "but I'm only going to ask you one more time, Shayne," He held out his hand. "The money."

"Sure," Shayne said easily, handing the bag over to Quentin.

He saw the barrels of Maxwell's and Larry's guns start to come up, and he went on hurriedly, "Don't you think you'd better check to see that it's all there before your men waste us?"

"Hold it," Quentin snapped. Maxwell and Larry paused. "I hope for your sake you didn't try to doublecross me, Shayne."

He set the bag down on a coffee table in front of the sofa and began to work the catches. Helen, Maxwell, and Larry all glanced in that direction.

Shayne squeezed his eyes shut and wished the girl would let go of his arm.

Quentin jerked the bag open, and let out a scream as blinding light filled the room.

Shayne shoved with both arms, thrusting Lucy and the girl away from him. He knew the flare would last only a split second, and he opened his eyes as guns began to go off.

Quentin was staggering wildly, arms aflame from the trap Shayne had rigged, using magnesium trouble flares from his car. Maxwell and Larry were both blinded momentarily, but they were firing in the direction where they thought Shayne was. He had moved as soon as he opened his eyes, though, diving to the floor and jerking his pistol from its holster. Lucy was hugging the floor a few feet away, but Helen Morgan and the girl she had trained for her scheme of revenge were both screaming and standing upright. A stray bullet could hit either one of them.

There was no time for finesse. Shayne shot Maxwell twice in the stomach, moved the barrel of his pistol over, and pumped two more slugs into Larry's torso. The bullets knocked both men backwards. They crumpled, shrieking, then writhed for a moment before going abruptly still.

Shayne got to his feet. Quentin had dropped to his knees and stopped screaming. He was whimpering now as he tried frantically to beat out the flames that had spread from his arms to his body. Shayne stepped up behind him, swung his arm, and cracked the gun sharply against Quentin's head. The man fell forward onto his face, unconscious, and Shayne quickly smothered the fire with a rug from the floor.

When he turned around, the stench of burned flesh and death filled his nostrils, he found Lucy standing calmly in the center of the room, holding a gun that had been dropped by one of the others. She was covering Helen Morgan, and she gave Shayne a strained smile as she said, "I guess we wait for the police now, right, Michael?"

"That's right, Angel." Shayne stepped up to her, put out a hand and

squeezed her arm briefly. The simple touch spoke volumes for both of them.

The girl whose resemblance to Phyllis had started the whole chain of events in motion stood against the wall, hands to her mouth and eyes wide in terror. Shayne stepped over to her, looked into her dark eyes, and said flatly, "It's all over now."

"Michael? I was so scared!" She came into his arms, burying her face against his shirt. His arms started to come up and embrace her, but he stopped himself.

"It's no good," he said. "This whole farce is over, I said. And that includes your act."

She tilted her tear-streaked face back to look at him. "But, Michael—"

"I said stop it!" The words wrenching out of him. "You know you're not Phyllis Shayne, and you've known it since sometime earlier this evening. Your memory was probably coming back to you gradually all along, and then you remembered all of it when you were in my apartment. You hid the key there, and you wouldn't have done that if you hadn't known who was after you and why."

She shook her head. "No, that's not true. You can't just assume such a thing!"

"Then how about this," he said coldly. "It's obvious you took my .32 from the apartment. You probably slipped it into your purse before you went into my bedroom. Quentin's men didn't expect you to be armed. They left you at that sleazy hotel while they went after me, after you convinced them that you didn't have the money with you. You took your guard by surprise, shot him, and then slipped out of the place. But I think you must have hung around until you saw me going in, because you called the cops and told them that I was there committing a murder. You thought my presence there, and the fact that it was my gun you killed him with, would be enough to hang the frame on me. But it wasn't." He looked disgusted with himself. "And to think I wiped the prints off the gun, trying to protect you before I figured it all out!"

She was breathing heavily now, her eyes like the eyes of a trapped animal. "You can't believe I'd do a thing like that."

"You're the only one who would have," he countered. "It was a woman who tipped off the cops, and at first I suspected Helen. But after I thought about it, I realized that she wouldn't have tried to frame me, not then, with the money still missing. But you knew where the key was. You wanted me out of circulation. You thought you could hide out with Lucy for a while, then get into my place some way, get

the key back, and take off with the money. It had to be you, and you had to know who you really are by then."

"Oh, no, no, Michael, I wouldn't do that! I love you, I'm your Angel —"

His hand whipped across her face. "Don't say it," he whispered in the silence following her cry. "Don't ever say it. All that's left to do now is wait for the police." He pushed her away from him, turned and met Lucy's eyes. He looked from her to the bodies on the floor to Quentin's unconscious form to the ruined overnight bag on the table, and to Helen Morgan. He looked back at Lucy, who swallowed and nodded.

And all the while, he heard the sobbing behind him.

EPILOGUE

DAWN WAS COMING UP OVER THE OCEAN, and four people sat in Mike Shayne's apartment. The big detective himself was slumped in his armchair, frowning down at his feet, Lucy sat on the arm of the chair, perched beside him, her hand resting lightly on his shoulder. Will Gentry and Timothy Rourke were sitting on the sofa, grim-faced. Shayne had just finished laying out the whole thing for them.

Gentry put his hands on his knees and said stolidly, "Well, we shouldn't have any trouble putting the whole lot of them away for a long time. The Morgan woman is so scared of going back to prison that she'll testify just for the chance of a lighter sentence. And we've got the money to use as evidence, too. I'm glad you left it in your car, Mike, and not in with that homemade bomb of yours."

Rourke flipped his notebook shut. "It's a hell of a story, Mike. We haven't seen one like this in a long time. It's still hard to believe how much that girl looked like Phyllis. I can't help but be sorry about the way some of it worked out, though."

"I think all of us are," Lucy said softly.

Shayne snorted. "Hell, the past is dead and gone. We all know that. We knew it from the start. Death's the only thing that never goes away."

"Now, Mike, don't you think that's kind of a bleak way —" Rourke began.

"Maybe. And maybe I'll feel differently later, but right now I'm not in much of a mood for company, Tim."

Rourke nodded and exchanged a glance with Gentry. Both of them stood up. "We'll be talking to you later, Mike," Gentry said, and then they slipped out the door.

Shayne raised his head and looked at the first rays of the sun breaking over the Bay. Miami Beach was beautiful in the sunrise, but it didn't mean a thing to him right now.

"I'm going to go, too, Michael," Lucy said, standing up.

He caught at her hand. "Wait a minute, Angel," he said "I didn't mean to be so —"

"How could you help it? Memory can be a hard thing, Michael, almost as hard as what you had to face up to last night. And it's all right for even a big redheaded shamus to feel hurt sometimes."

He looked up at her. "It's just that I've got to go through all of it and get rid of it, if I'm going to be able to put it behind me. It's just something I have to do sometimes."

She nodded, then bent over him and kissed him lightly. She went to the door, then looked back at him. "Michael," she said, "there's one thing besides death that never goes away."

A moment went by there in the dimness, and then Shayne said, "Lucy, I love you."

"I love you, too, Michael. I'll see you later."

And then she was gone, and Shayne was alone. But not really alone. The ghosts of the past were with him, waiting to be exorcised, at least the ones that needed it.

Shayne watched the sunrise, and remembered.

Next month Mike Shayne returns in a story set in 1943 Miami

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featuring the real Phyllis Shayne in the never-before-told story of what really happened to Mike's wife.

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"You know," Arby said, "the FBI's got Dillinger's death mask on the wall where all the tourists can see it? They wanted to tack a cast of my butt alongside."

OUTLAWS

by CARL HOFFMAN

ARBY VAN NOSTRAND THOUGHT: *ST. PAUL. John Dillinger country. Just the place for a bank robbery.*

"Ready?" he asked the two men in the front seat. The driver was plainly terrified, but little Sammy Burns looked confident as ever, steady as Baby Face Nelson.

Arby thought: *If only I could be like Sam.*

"Let's go," he said, and swung his big frame out of the car, pulling a ski mask over his face. Sam Burns followed. Arby felt the UZI slung under his coat, sixteen compact inches of 9 mm submachine gun, loaded with a 40-shot magazine. It was the kind of piece people in the movement killed for, the kind that scared bank tellers into doing what they were told.

I hope so, he thought grimly.

He pulled it from under his jacket as he stepped through the door, bellowing, "Freeze! This is a holdup!"

It was a small suburban bank, and there were just five people in it — three employees, a customer, and a guard. Arby leveled the UZI at the guard, who was no more than a kid with a straggling moustache and a big clumsy .357 magnum on his hip. "Drop it," Arby commanded. "Use the thumb and forefinger of your left hand."

The kid obeyed; the gun thumped to the all-weather carpet.

"Back away from it," Arby said. The kid did as he was told.

"Time," called Sam Burns. He was scurrying between the tellers' positions, stuffing bills in a plastic garbage bag.

"Forty seconds," Arby said. He knew that by now at least one of the employees had triggered the holdup alarm. But he wasn't worried; it had all been taken into account. They'd be miles away by the time the police arrived.

"One minute," yelled Arby.

"Got it," yelled Sam Burns. He raced to the exit and pushed through.

"Stay here ten minutes," Arby ordered the five statues in the bank. "I'll be waiting outside with this machine gun, and I'll shoot anybody who comes out before that."

He turned to the door, thinking, *so far, so good*. As he shoved out he could hear a siren, but it was still far away; plenty of time. Arby dived into the back seat. "Let's go," he said to the driver.

Then things began to go wrong.

The driver stamped the accelerator, the engine whining up and up, blue exhaust pouring from the tailpipe. But the car didn't move.

"You stinking jerk," Sam Burns shouted at the driver, "it's not in gear! It's still in Park!"

The driver was haunched over the wheel, visibly shaking.

Sam Burns jerked the gearshift, and the car jumped forward a few feet, then stalled.

"Start it again, jerk," Sam Burns shouted. The siren was growing steadily louder, joined now by a second one.

Then Arby heard shouts behind him and turned in the seat; the adolescent bank guard was rushing through the exit, the big black .357 huge and clumsy in his hand. He was leveling it at Arby. Arby struggled to free the UZI from the folds of his coat, just as the engine caught and the car lurched forward again. The big revolver bucked in the guard's hand as he fired, and the car's rear window shattered two feet from Arby's head. Arby brought the UZI up and fired a quick burst at the guard; the window exploded outward in a silver fountain of glass; the slugs caught the guard in the shoulder and arm and spun him backwards against the wall, the .357 out of reach.

"Come on, Arby!" Sam Burns yelled. "Let's get out of here!"

Arby turned, realizing the carhorn was wailing in one long blast. The nervous driver wasn't nervous anymore; he lay slumped against the steering wheel with his brains decorating the inside of the windshield.

"Let's get out of here!" Sam Burns shouted again.

The sirens were very loud now. They got out and ran.

FIVE HOURS LATER THEY SAT IN A HOUSE IN MINNEAPOLIS, in the middle of six angry, frightened faces, the assembled forces of socialist revolution in the Twin Cities.

"A couple of professionals," the fat girl said. Her name was Jessica, and she headed the cadre, "A couple of stinking revolutionaries who been at it since 1970. That robbed so many banks they could do it in their sleep. And they come all the way from Berkeley to help us, and all they can do is make a hero out of a bank guard that blows down one of my best men."

Sammy Burns was angry. "That was one of your best, I'd hate to see your worst. That stupid jerk almost totaled us, froze at the wheel —"

"Shut up," Jessica said. "That stinking guard was on the ten o'clock news on every channel. Next thing he'll hire a ghostwriter for his autobiography. *How I Got to Be A Capitalist Stooge*, I can see it now. Where's the rest of the money?"

"You lousy slut —" Sam Burns began, but Arby stopped him with a hand on the arm. He knew how to handle the revolutionary over-achievers like Jessica: turn theorist and argue with them, or shut up and do what they said.

"Fourteen K," Arby said quietly. "That's all. If you want any more, go back to the bank."

"You're stinking lucky you got it," said Jessica. "You'd really be in trouble if you didn't. What'd you do with the gun, anyhow?"

"What gun?" demanded Sam Burns.

"What gun," repeated Jessica. "You're a real soldier, all right. He would've been stinking happy to have you along. What gun is the one that blasted the guard."

Again Sam Burns started to say something, and again Arby halted him. "We threw it in the river," he said quietly.

"Where?"

"Off the campus bridge on the way over here. It was dark. Nobody saw us."

The fat girl watched him suspiciously for a moment. Then she looked satisfied. "Gimme the car keys."

"What car keys?" asked Sam Burns.

"Do I have to explain everything to you? The car keys from the switch car. We gotta get rid of it."

Sam burns looked questioningly at Arby, who nodded. Burns dug in his pocket and handed over the keys.

"Good," said Jessica. "You boys are being real cooperative. Anyhow, the clique's decided you should leave town for awhile."

"Just hold onto your tee shirt, sister —" began Sam Burns.

"It's for your own good," said Jessica. "And for the good of the movement. You'll spend the night upstairs, but first thing tomorrow Flash and some friends'll take you up north. We got a place up there. There's gonna be too much heat in the Cities the next couple of weeks for you to hang around here."

"Sure," Arby said. "Anything you say." Sam Burns glared at him, but Arby remained impassive.

"Like I say," Jessica told them, "the smarter you are, the more you'll co-operate. You two are sizzling right now. Stick with us and you'll come out all right." She looked at them. "Get some sleep."

They went upstairs.

IT WAS THREE A.M. BEFORE THEY CAME DOWN AGAIN. The guard in the front room was half asleep, and they had no problem knocking him unconscious and tying him up in the basement with his shirt stuffed in his mouth. They slipped out the back door, and Arby retrieved something from under a bush. He returned to the kitchen momentarily, then came out again empty-handed. They slipped down the alley. A block from the intersection of Lake and Hennepin, Sam Burns stopped to hotwire a car while Arby went ahead to a phone booth.

"Minneapolis Police Department," said the sleepy voice that answered the call.

"Thirty-first and Grand," said Arby. "Got that?"

"What about it?"

"The green house. There's a lot of money there. And a machine gun behind the refrigerator that shot a bank guard in St. Paul this afternoon."

"Who's this?"

"You wouldn't be interested. Talk to Jessica. She lives there. But you better see her fast."

He hung up. Sam Burns, driving the hotwired car, pulled up next to the phone booth.

"Let's go, Baby Face," Arby said as he climbed inside.

"Where?"

"Wisconsin. I've got plans for a guy named Flanagan."

Five minutes later they were on the interstate, speeding over the river and out of the sleeping Cities, bound east and south through the streaming darkness toward an emerald city that shimmered in Arby's

mind like a vision; fortress of counterculture, the goal he had been chasing all these years, scene of his upcoming Big Score: Madison.

11:25 SATURDAY NIGHT AND OH BOY, WHAT A NIGHT, beer was running in the gutters. D and D, DWI. Detective Sergeant Dennis Flanagan of the Madison Police Department sat behind his typewriter trying to begin an arrest report on a drunken coed.

"Name?" he asked her.

"You aren't a cop, your hair's too long," the girl said.

"Name?"

"The first time I'm arrested, and they don't even give me a real cop."

"Name?"

"Who was that chick who brought me in?"

Flanagan sighed. "That was no chick. That was Patrolwoman Moses."

Patrolwoman Moses had brought the drunken coed in ten minutes ago, after apprehending her on Capital Square with an empty beer bottle in her hand. The drunken girl was using the bottle to beat a young man who lay unconscious on the sidewalk. She had calmed down considerably since the time of the arrest, but it had happened too late for the young man, who was now in the emergency room at University Hospitals.

"What's your name?" Flanagan asked.

The phone rang.

"Excuse me." He picked it up. "Squadroom. Flanagan."

"Dennis Flanagan?" said the voice on the other end. "I need to talk to you."

"Go ahead."

"Not on the phone. Face to face."

"Come up to the squadroom. I'm on till midnight."

"Not there either. The lake in Vilas Park. As soon as you get off."

"Who is this?"

"Pete Landry."

"The reporter? How are things in the underground newspaper business?"

"Great. I need to talk to you."

"To tell the truth, Pete, we've been swamped all night, and I'm pretty tired —"

"It's about an old friend of yours."

"Who?"

"Vilas Park, Dennis. Midnight."

The line went dead. Flanagan shrugged and put back the phone. The drunken girl was studying the woodgrains of the desktop. "Hey, these are pretty. So how come they let a hippie like you on the police force?"

"I threatened to bomb the place if they didn't. Let's go."

"Where?"

"The holding cell. You'll have to sober up before we talk anymore."

"Hey, wow, that sounds great. I've never been in jail before."

The phone rang. Flanagan picked it up. "Squadroom."

"I meant it, Dennis. I need to talk to you."

There was a click. Flanagan stared at the phone.

"Hurry up," said the drunken girl. "I have to go to the bathroom."

AT TEN MINUTES PAST MIDNIGHT FLANAGAN WAS CRUISING slowly along the winding drives in Vilas Park, past the parked cars with their foggy windshields and the occasional beer-and-grass parties among the trees. Where the road curved nearest to Lake Wingra he pulled off, wondering why the hell he had come all the way out here anyway. He began walking across a field toward the lake's edge, and halfway there he stumbled into a mud puddle. He yanked his foot out, cursing. By the time he reached the shore he was very angry.

"Dennis?" said a voice nearby, the same voice Flanagan had heard over the phone. "Down here."

"This had better be good, Landry. It's been a long day." Flanagan could see the reporter now, a shadow in the darkness.

"It's good, partner, don't worry. It's so good you'll be wearing a lieutenant's badge by the time the week's over."

Flanagan didn't answer.

"Correct me if I'm wrong," Landry said. "You have unique qualities for an officer in the Madison Police Department. You have long hair."

"That's stretching the point."

"But not much. You were hired in 1973 as a token, because his honor Mayor Pike wanted to score points with the liberal voters of our fair city. He figured he needed a hippie cop or two to spruce up his image, which, let's face it, was pretty reactionary. So you got hired, the establishment press went to work, and pretty soon your picture was in all the papers."

"I wasn't the only one. And I work hard."

"I'm not saying you don't. You work so hard they've made you a detective sergeant sooner than anybody you went to the police academy with. Though personally I think the whole thing stinks."

"Sorry to disappoint you." Flanagan turned to walk away.

"Hold it, Dennis," Landry called after him.

Flanagan continued walking.

"Hey hold it, Dennis." Landry jogged after him. "Really. You and I've got to talk."

Flanagan stopped. "So talk."

"I hear that back in college you used to know a guy that became a revolutionary. The way I hear it, this guy ran off and traveled all over the country. The FBI even had him on the Ten Most Wanted list for awhile. But they took him off it because they couldn't catch him. Old J. Edgar was too embarrassed about it. Is that right, Flanagan?"

"Arby Van Nostrand. What about him?"

"He wants to talk to you, I hear."

"About what?"

"We'll get to that."

"Why me?"

"Because you're old pals. Because he thinks he can trust you." Landry's cockiness was returning now. "Why he thinks that, I don't know. But he does."

"He wants to talk tonight?"

"Gee whiz," Landry said. "You're a real detective."

IT WAS QUARTER TO MIDNIGHT, and Sammy Burns knew he was going to score. He wished Arby was here to see he hadn't lost the old touch; after all, it had been months since he'd been in a bar. But Arby was back at the office, waiting while Landry slipped the bait to Flanagan. Getting to Flanagan was the whole point of the operation.

"You're drunk," the blonde said, playing hard to get.

"No I'm not," lied Sam Burns. "I'm perfectly sober."

He was drunk all right. His head felt like the pivot of a merry-go-round, the entire tavern wheeling on it. But tonight he was invincible. He couldn't be stopped. He was going to score.

"I'm leaving," said the blonde.

"Fine. I'll go with you." Sam Burns stood up.

"Not so fast. I'm meeting a friend."

"You're so pretty. I'd do anything for you. Just anything."

Something sly appeared in the blonde's eyes. "All right," she said, "I'll make a deal with you. I've always wanted a beer pitcher —"

"You mean like that one?" Sam Burns pointed at the pitcher he had just killed.

"Right," said the blonde. "I'll go outside and wait for you. If you bring me that pitcher, we'll go to another bar together. Deal?"

"I'll even throw in the glasses," said Sam Burns.

The blonde slung her purse and left, prissing down the aisle. Sam

Burns shaded his eyes and peered out the tavern window; if she didn't stop and wait, the deal was off, he'd follow her right away. But there she was, waiting on the sidewalk.

It was time to move out.

He picked up the two beer glasses and tucked them in the empty pitcher. They made a racket going in, but Sammy Burns wasn't worried. He was an expert shoplifter. Fingers like fine wires that looped things before you knew they were gone. A beer pitcher and two glasses were no problem, none whatsoever.

At the door a big fellow with a beard had stopped a pair of coeds so he could examine their identification cards. He looked nice and busy. Sam Burns started for the door, carrying the pitcher casually down by his side so his body would screen it from the big guy with the beard. As Sam Burns brushed by the coeds, his shoulder jarred against the doorframe. The glasses clinked.

The big guy looked up. "Just a minute."

"Huh?" said Sam Burns.

"What's in your hand?"

The big guy reached for the pitcher with the glasses inside, and Sam Burns jerked his hand away, losing his grip. The pitcher dropped bottom first, shattering into a dozen pieces that twinkled and flashed. One of the beerglasses, which had survived the fall unscathed, rolled to a stop against Sam Burns' foot.

"Idiot," said the big guy.

"I didn't do that," said Sam Burns. But then he remembered who he was, and where he was, and the fact that he was drunk, and for the first time in years, he panicked.

He ran.

If he had turned right instead of left as he burst out the door, he might have been okay. He might have been able to lose himself in the crowd and double back to the car later. But he had panicked. He wasn't thinking. The car was a half block up the street to his left, and he ran toward it, the bearded guy yelling behind him, people on the sidewalk laughing and grinning at Sam Burns as he ran up the street.

"Stop him!" the bearded guy shouted.

Sam Burns had almost reached the car when he came face to face with Sergeant Melville Dutton of the Madison Police Department. Dutton was head of the city's SWAT-team, but he was on street patrol tonight, partly to keep his hand in, and partly because it was Saturday, and Saturdays always afforded an opportunity to hit someone. He heard the bearded guy yelling, and started toward Sam Burns with his nightstick raised. Sam Burns reacted out of blind instinct, fumbling for

his pistol.

It just wasn't Sam Burns' night.

Dutton was an expert marksman and fast-draw artist with hours of practice. He drew his service revolver quicker than Wyatt Earp and coolly shot Sam Burns four times through the chest. The range was less than six feet, and the pattern of shots formed a small perfect square through Sam Burns' heart and lungs. Pedestrians screamed and Sam Burns hit the pavement.

Dutton stood over him, then knelt and turned the body over.

Damned if this guy didn't look familiar somehow, damned if he didn't. He searched the body quickly before the other cops arrived, and bingo, there was at least one item of interest, the kind of thing that just might make a career.

Forty-five minutes later the attendants were just lifting Sam Burns into the back of the ambulance. "Go through it again," said Lt. Nazareth Akgoulian to Dutton. "One more time."

"Yes sir," Dutton said. "He came running out of the bar, and I heard the guy yelling at him. I moved to stop him. He went for his piece, so I had to shoot him."

"You're sure he knew you were a policeman?"

"He looked right in my face. Besides, why else would he go for his gun?"

"Why didn't you use your nightstick to try to stop him before he pulled the pistol? Why didn't you attempt to restrain him manually?"

"Just then I wasn't sure exactly what he'd done in the bar. It might have been a robbery. He might have been armed. I didn't want to put myself at a disadvantage."

Akgoulian put away his notebook wearily. "You're a good man, Dutton. I'm sorry I have to ask you these questions, but that's what policework is like these days. Any idea who he was? There's no ID on the body."

"No idea at all, sir." Dutton could barely restrain a smile.

"We'll work on it," said Akgoulian. "In the meantime, I want you to go home and take the rest of the night off. Relax, have a drink."

"Yes, sir."

Dutton walked up the block as if headed toward his car. But once he turned the corner he stepped into a doorway and waited. When the last police car left the scene and the crowd had broken up, he returned to the strip of sidewalk where he had shot Sam Burns. In his hand was the set of car keys he had taken from the dead man's pocket before the ambulance arrived. It was just a hunch, but it might pay off.

And it did, fast.

The keys fit a beat-up tan Chevy parked only a few feet from the spot where Dutton had shot the kid. A handful of pedestrians watched as he opened the door, searched the glove compartment, and shone his flashlight under the seats.

"Get the hell out of here," Dutton growled at the spectators.

They left. He went on ransacking the car.

There wasn't much to be found. In fact, there was only one item of interest: the auto registration slip. The name on it was Amy Ellen Martino, 426A W. Mifflin, Madison. In the middle of the student ghetto.

The pieces were starting to fall together.

IT TOOK DUTTON FIVE MINUTES TO GET OVER TO THE HOUSE, a three-story bungalow with a wide porch that had been carved into apartments by the landlord. He pounded the door of apartment A; the bolt scratched, and a tall cool gypsy of a woman peered sleepily through the chain lock. Dutton could see she was wearing a thigh-length kimono with probably nothing underneath.

She yawned and said, "It can't wait till tomorrow, I guess."

"Amy Ellen Martino?"

"Right."

"I'd like to talk to you. Can I come in?"

"It's too late at night, officer. What do you want?"

"I'd be more polite if I were you. A girl in your position could use some friends."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Where's your car?"

The girl looked wary. "I lent it to a friend."

"What friend?"

"My roommate."

"What's your roommate's name?"

"What's this about?"

"Aren't you going to let me in?"

"No. And I think you can come back tomorrow."

She attempted to shut the door, but Dutton had his toe wedged in it. He smiled; she glared.

"Not so fast," he said soothingly. "We ought to work something out."

"Do you want me to call the station and report you?"

"That wouldn't be good, Amy. Not for me, but especially not for you. You'd get in big trouble."

She said nothing.

"Who's your roommate?" Dutton asked.

"Not until you tell me what's going on."

"Sure. Your car was used in the commission of a felony earlier tonight. I thought I'd come over and make sure you weren't in on it."

"Well I wasn't. Satisfied?"

"Who's your roommate?"

She didn't answer.

"We made a deal, Amy. I told you what happened, now you tell me who your roommate is. What's her name?"

The girl hesitated before answering. "It's not a woman. His name's Pete Landry."

"I've heard of him somewhere."

"He's a reporter."

"That's it. One of the big papers, or a porno sheet?"

"Contact. An alternative paper."

"A porno sheet. Is Landry the one that's always writing about the Weathermen?"

She nodded.

"Where'd he go tonight?"

"I don't know."

"You can do better than that, Amy."

"I said I don't know."

"I'll try again later." He smiled. "Keep the bed warm. For your boyfriend, of course."

He left, making plenty of noise. He got in his car and drove around the corner. He made no noise at all as he tiptoed back to 426 West Mifflin sixty seconds later. The porch lamp was off now, but a light was burning behind a curtain in one of the side windows. Dutton stood under it, and at last, quite distinctly, he heard a telephone being cradled. The light went off, and he padded toward the rear of the house and a partially-open window. A door closed inside, but there were no voices. He listened intently for perhaps ten minutes. Then he must have shifted footing.

"Who's that?" said Amy Martino's voice from inside.

Dutton stiffened.

"Who's that?"

Dutton didn't wait for her to come looking. He slipped quickly away, cutting across the parking lot in the center of the block. At least he was sure of one thing: no one else was in the house with Amy Martino.

There was just one place left to go.

"THE NEXT CORNER," LANDRY SAID. "PULL OVER."

Flanagan braked the car and looked around. "Where is he?"

"Making sure we weren't tailed. You're on the run long enough, you start getting a little paranoid. He'll be here in a minute." Landry slid behind the wheel. "Get in back."

Flanagan was out of the car, just about to climb into the rear seat, when the big man stepped out of the shadows across the street. It wasn't the same Arby he remembered; the beergut and baby fat had burned away. He was almost wasted. But there was something vigorous and familiar about the walk.

Then Flanagan could see the eyes.

"How are you, Dennis," Arby said. "Let's get in the car."

Landry waited until they were inside, then pulled out.

"You look different," Flanagan said.

"Don't we all," said Arby. "It's been six years, pal."

"How's life?"

"It stinks. The war's over and the movement's had it. There isn't going to be any revolution, at least not the kind we were planning. And all this running all over the country's getting to be a waste of time. My friends are sick of me."

"So you want to give yourself up?"

"I couldn't think of a better present for America. It was all a fraud anyway. I was a threat to the government the way a pigeon is. If the pigeon works hard, he'll crap up a statue. But that's it."

"The FBI didn't think so."

"The FBI was trying to keep up its image. You know they've actually got Dillinger's death mask on the wall where all the tourists can see it? They wanted to tack a cast of my butt alongside. That's what outlaws are for in this century. Amusement for them asses, advancement for the bureaucrats. But I ain't playing anymore."

"You think you can make it stick?"

"That's what's so funny, Dennis. You know what I've been running from all these years? Two lousy warrants. Interstate flight and interstate transportation of a stolen vehicle. They got my bail money, and they got the car back. Hoover's dead. What more do you want?"

"You didn't do anything else these past few years? You haven't maybe stepped out of line once or twice?"

"Maybe I have, Dennis, and maybe I haven't. But there's only those two warrants outstanding, and I can beat them."

"How do you want me to help?"

"I want you to get hold of the U.S. Attorney. Tell him I want to retire."

"Soon?"

"Tonight. Now."

"You're putting me on the line too, Arby. If something goes wrong I'd be consorting with a criminal, and it could be the end of my career as a cop. I could even end up in jail."

"I came to Madison because you're the guy to take the chance, Dennis. But nothing's going to go wrong. The U.S. prosecutor's on the make; I've checked it out. He'll be so happy to see me I'll probably end up as assistant for the southern district."

Flanagan hesitated a moment before answering. "Okay."

"Let's make a phone call," Arby said to Landry.

The reporter stopped driving aimlessly, and turned back toward the University.

DUTTON PARKED ON THE SIDE STREET and slipped silently down the alley to a place where he could take a long look at the offices of *Madison Contact*. All the windows were dark except for an office on the first floor.

When he was satisfied it was safe, he crept up to the lighted window, removed his hat and peeked inside. The place was empty. He waited fifteen minutes in case someone was coming back, then stood on a trashcan and felt along the windows. They were French-style, fastened at the bottom by a single hook and eye. He opened them with a jack-knife inserted between the window and sill.

He climbed inside.

The corridor door was open, and on it he could read the name Peter Landry. But at first glance there was nothing incriminating in the office, just some old newspapers and a coffee pot. He stepped into the corridor, found a fire exit several steps down the hall, returned to the office, and refastened the windows. He began to search the place, being careful to leave everything in the same order he found it.

It wasn't long before he hit paydirt.

In the closet were a pair of rolled-up sleeping bags. Reaching into the center of the smaller one, Dutton felt pistols and ammunition. There was a wallet too, with ten dollars in cash and a fistful of credit cards, each with a different name on it. The photos in the wallet consisted mostly of nudes from magazines; there was just one snapshot, taken under a tree in someone's backyard. The little guy Dutton had killed in front of the bar tonight was in the picture, along with a big fellow who looked familiar too. Dutton didn't know exactly who he was, but he was probably a communist radical like his pal. He might even be the owner of the second sleeping bag.

Dutton found more guns in the other sleeping bag, and went through

the desk drawer, too. Then he slipped out the fire escape and hid in the shadows by the side of the building, waiting for whoever owned the second sleeping bag to come back. He considered phoning for a back-up unit but decided against it; he'd brought the investigation this far through his own efforts, and he'd see it to the end. Besides, if the stakeout drew a zero there'd be no embarrassment and no explaining. And there couldn't be more than two suspects, counting Landry.

He waited in the shadows for a half-hour. Occasionally cars cruised past, headed for the University two blocks away.

The Dodge pulled up at 2:03. Dutton squinted, trying to see who was inside. It parked in front of the *Contact* offices; its doors opened like wings; voices broke the quiet air. Dutton could see there were three of them: the big guy, a shorter one that was probably Landry, and a third man with long hair. He strained to make out their faces as they approached the front door through a tangle of shadows. Stealthily he drew his service revolver; he hadn't planned on this many, but he could handle them as long as they stayed close together. He had to take them by surprise; hit quick, hit hard, like the Marines had taught him. He stepped away from the side of the building, out to where they could see his uniform, but not to where he'd make a good target if they pulled some iron, booming, "Police! Hands up!"

They stopped all right, but Dutton didn't like it; they milled uncertainly, the big guy hissing urgently to the longhair, the longhair sidling away, so that Dutton knew if he didn't take control for keeps something might happen, the kind of something that could plant him among the headstones on a hillside, and he shouted, "Right now! Up against the wall!"

"Dutton, you stupid —" said the longhair, and Dutton was just turning cold at hearing his name, realizing that something was badly out of place here, when somehow there was a pistol in the big guy's hand, the big guy was shouting something like "How'd you do it, how?" and raising the black automatic not at Dutton, which would have been the logical thing, but on the longhair, his companion, and the longhair was throwing himself to one side as the big guy fired. There was a cry of pain from the longhair, and then Dutton was shooting too, seeing blood and bone explode from the big guy's chest as the first bullet smashed home. The big guy was starting to fall, but he still was aiming at the longhair, shooting, and the longhair was rolling and scrambling over the ground at the base of the building. Then, as if he had given up, he lay still, waiting for the final shots from the big man, but before they came Dutton ripped out four more slugs that punctured the big man's chest and stomach and he fell in a heap,

his feet working as he died, as if he was trying to run away.

"Don't shoot!" cried the third man, hidden behind a tree.

"Come out from behind there!" Dutton yelled back. "You're Landry, aren't you?"

"Yeah."

Dutton handcuffed him to the *Contact* door. Then, very deliberately, he pulled out his flashlight and walked toward the longhair, who lay groaning at the base of the wall. Lights were starting to come on in the houses across the street; voices were beginning to be heard.

The light hit the longhair between the eyes, and Dutton's curses began.

THE NIGHT WAS NOT OVER. In the hours remaining before daylight a great many things happened.

In the emergency room of University Hospitals the night intern worked excitedly on Dennis Flanagan. The intern was enthused because these were the first gunshot wounds he had seen in his short medical career, and though they weren't that serious — a graze along the ribcage and a hole through the fleshy part of the leg — they were good experience that broke up the normally dull nightshift. On the hospital's basement level, meanwhile, an assistant coronor, not excited at all, was arranging the body of Arby Van Nostrand. The assistant coroner saw two or three new corpses every day, and as far as he was concerned, this was just another stiff.

On the seventh floor of police headquarters, Sergeant Melville Dutton and Lieutenant Nazareth Akgoulian sat in a bright-lit room, talking heatedly.

"So you disobeyed orders, withheld evidence, and killed two suspects in one night," Akgoulian was saying. "As well as being responsible for the shooting of a fellow officer. Tell me exactly what you thought you were doing last night."

"A job," Dutton told him. "I brought in a couple of hoods that needed bringing in."

"Who were bringing themselves in," Akgoulian corrected. "According to Landry, Van Nostrand was tired of running. If he surrendered to our department, it would have made national headlines. But you queered it by shooting him."

"I don't think so," Dutton said. "I think I saved the department from infiltration by the radical underground."

Akgoulian stopped. "Excuse me from being so stupid, but exactly where you do get that idea?"

"Flanagan has a record as a student protester, right? And he was

actually consorting with a criminal, right?"

"A criminal who was going to give himself up."

"Who *Landry* says was going to give himself up. *Landry* works for a porno sheet that'll do anything it can to stir up trouble in this town. Their past record proves it. I wouldn't believe anything *Landry* says unless it can be verified three different ways."

"If *Van Nostrand* wasn't here to turn himself in, what was he doing?"

"Setting up *Flanagan*. Getting ready to blackmail him. So the underground would have their own man in the department, someone who had access to records and could communicate with federal investigative agencies."

"I don't like *Flanagan* any more than you do, but that's ridiculous."

"What's so ridiculous about it? It all fits: Honestly, Lieutenant, I don't see what you're so excited about. You and me did something to be proud of tonight, something that could help both our careers. We brought in a couple of terrorists the FBI's been wanting for years. If that's something to be ashamed of, I've got the wrong idea about what cops are for."

Akgoulian hesitated.

"You know the mayor, don't you?" *Dutton* asked.

"Yes. We've been friends for years."

"Maybe he'd like to know what's going on. From you, personally, one friend to another."

"Maybe he would."

JUST AS THE SUN WAS COMING UP OVER THE CITY, Lieutenant *Akgoulian* phoned Mayor *Pike* and explained the situation. *Pike* was a politician who could tell which way the water was running, and he lost no time announcing a press conference for the following morning. In it, he planned to commend Sergeant *Dutton* for his brilliant police-work and announce his promotion to Detective Lieutenant on the Madison Police Department, even though this was technically beyond his authority. Mayor *Pike* decided not to mention the name of *Dennis Flanagan* either positively or negatively, since there appeared to be gray areas about the events of the previous night the leftist elements of the city press could pounce on. Besides, having made so much of *Flanagan's* hiring, *Pike* could scarcely fire or demote him, even though he richly deserved it, without considerable personal embarrassment.

It was full daylight as he began writing his statement for release to the press.

IN A BED AT UNIVERSITY HOSPITALS, under the influence of assorted painkillers, Dennis Flanagan lay thinking thoughts of his dead friend Arby Van Nostrand, dreaming dreams that always ended in a chaos of gunfire.

Six yers, six years, he thought. Outlaws you can't tell one from another.

Outside his window the sky was so blue he didn't believe it. ●

Mike's Mail

SERENDIPITY

I'm a tired, middle-aged factory janitor who collects and reads fiction, and I do often need and appreciate a good laugh. I'll confess that though I buy MSMM to keep my file complete I usually opt for Ellery Queen or Alfred Hitchcock, so I believe Mike should retire, marry Lucy, buy a chicken farm, and patch the holes in the Buick.

However, tonight after polishing off Shayne, I read and enjoyed *The Basics of Murder* by Mertz [MSMM, May 1980], with reservations about the MP officer being so co-operative with a civilian acting for an enlisted man.

Then I began reading *Unhappy Hour* by Paul Gleeson. This tale deserves to be anthologized. I've been smiling at my mop for the last hour, and plan to lend the magazine to a bartender friend who is laid up with a bad elbow (honest!). No doubt Gleeson has gone into a bar where the few customers unsocially stared straight ahead like zombies and fantasized until he just had to go home and hop upon his hot little typewriter. You were lucky to get the story, as I feel it could have been submitted to, say, Playboy and found acceptance there. And he is right there in Chicago, too, could have called Hef and laid the plot on him. If I were you, I'd sign him up for a few more.

Now I'll read the rest of the magazine with anticipation. Thanks for a nice bit of serendipity.

Bruce Moffitt
Brookfield, MO

You're welcome. Another unusual Gleeson story will be in the October issue.

A dull, muffled sound came from the back of the plane. A series of jolts. Then they were falling, the plane and the entire world — falling, falling . . .

YOU CAN GO NOW

by DENNIS ETCHISON

THE RECEIVER PURRED IN HIS HAND.

He glanced around the bedroom, feeling as if he had just awakened from a long, dreamless sleep.

A click, then recorded music. He had been placed on hold.

There was something he was trying to remember. Everything seemed to be ready, but —

“Thank-you-for-waiting-good-afternoon-Pacific-Southwest-Airlines-may-I-help-you?”

He told the voice about his reservation; he was sure he had one. Would she —

Yes. Confirmed.

He thanked her and hung up.

Wait. What was the flight number? He must have written it down — yes. It was probably in his wallet.

He bent over the coat on the bed, feeling for the slim leather billfold. There, in the breast pocket. He fumbled through business cards, odd papers, credit plates.

No.

But no matter. He would find out when he got there.

Still, there was *something*.

He pulled out the drawer in the nightstand, under the phone, and started poking around, not even sure of what he was looking for.

He found a long, unmarked envelope, near the bottom. He took it and held it tightly as he slipped the coat on, then put it into the inside

pocket while he felt with his other hand for the keys. He patted his outer pockets, but they were not there.

Head down, he left the room.

His bags were stacked neatly by the wall of the foyer, but the keys were not there. He paced through the living room, the kitchen, checking the tables.

He went back to the bedroom, eyes down.

There.

By the door. The key ring was wedged by the bottom edge, between the door and the pile of the carpet, as though it had been flung or kicked there.

He picked it up, walked to the front door, lifted his bags, and went out to the car.

IT WAS STILL EARLY AFTERNOON, so the freeway would be a clear shot most of the way.

He switched off the air conditioning — who had left it on? — and rolled down the window, stretching out. The seat was adjusted wrong again, damn it, so he had to grope for the lever and push with his feet, struggling to seat the runner back another notch.

He connected through to the San Diego Freeway, made the turn and tried to unwind the rest of the way. He sampled the radio, but it was only more of the same: back scratchings about love or the lack of it and the pleasure or the pain it brought or might bring; maybe, could be, possibly, for sure, always, never, too soon, not soon enough, in the wrong rain or the wrong style. *Wrong, wrong.* He flicked it off.

The airport turnoff would be coming up.

He flexed his arm, checking his watch. But it had stopped. The face was spattered with dry, flaking paint, so it would have been hard to read the numbers, anyway.

He toed the accelerator until he was moving five miles over the speed limit, then ten.

He spotted the terminal off ramp. He eased over, barely noticing the other lanes.

He was glad to have made such good time; a few extra minutes would mean a drink first, maybe two —

It was funny. The car ahead, at the foot of the ramp. The back-up lights were on, but not the brake lights. He did not slow, because it meant that the signal at the intersection would be —

Headlights. They were headlights.

Headed directly at him.

You can go now, said a voice.

He leaned on the horn, but then there was the heavy, bone-snapping impact and everything was driven into him with such force that the horn stayed on, bleating like a siren, whether or not he would have wanted it to or would even have thought of it or of anything, of anything else at all.

HE WAS LATE GETTING TO LAX, so he swung at once into the Western parking lot, hoofed it over to the PSA building and sloughed his bags through the metal detector without stopping at the Flight Information desk. A couple of quick questions later, a hostess in a Halloween-colored uniform was pointing him toward the boarding tunnel, and then another was ushering him onto the plane and forward into the smoking section.

He stashed his bags and found himself in a seat on the aisle, facing a pregnant woman and two drugged-looking hyperactive children. They continued to squirm, but slowly, as though underwater, as he tugged at the seat belt, trying to dislodge the oversized buckle from beneath his buttocks.

A double vodka and two cigarettes later, he was halfway to Oakland and swinging inland away from the silvery tilt of the sea. He drained the ice against his teeth and snared the elbow of a stewardess.

Another?

Well, the bottles were all put away, but — yes. Of course.

Of course.

The smaller child was busy on the floor in front of the seat, trying to tear out the pages of a washable cloth picture book about animals who wore gloves and had one-syllable names. The child had already stripped the airline coloring book, the oxygen mask instruction card and the air sickness bag into piles of ragged chits. Now, however, he dropped his work and wobbled to his feet, straining to clamber up the seat and under his mother's smock.

But the mother was absorbed in the counting and re-counting of empty punch cups — one, two, three, see? one, two three — over and over, for the older child, who was working with all his might to slide out from under his seat belt. He would flatten like a limbo dancer until his shoes touched the floor and his knees buckled; then the mother would reach down, hoist him back up and begin counting the cups for him again.

"One, two, three, see? Why don't you try, Joshua?"

Ignored, the smaller child twisted like a bendable rubber doll and, sucking the ink off two fingers, watched the man across from him.

Who looked away. He was, mercifully, beginning to feel something from the double: a familiar ease, faint but unmistakable. He folded his hands, cold against each other, and tried to unwind while there was still time. He caught a glimpse out the window of farmlands sectioned like the layers of a surgical operation, beyond the flashing tip of the wing.

The child followed his eyes. "Break-ing," the child announced.

Idly he watched the wing swaying slowly as it knifed through the air currents. He remembered seeing the wing moving up and down like that on his first flight, how he worried that it might break off until someone had explained to him about expansion and contraction and allowances for stress.

"What's breaking?" said the mother. "Nothing's breaking, Jeremiah. Look, look what Mommy's . . ."

The stewardess reappeared. She rattled the plastic serving tray, bending over his lap with the drink.

He reached into his back pocket for his wallet.

"Want more punch!" said the older child.

"More punch?" asked the stewardess.

The wallet wasn't there. He remembered. He reached inside his coat.

He felt a long envelope, and the billfold. He removed both, peeled off two bills and laid them on the tray.

"Break-ing!" said the smaller child.

At that moment a shadow passed over the tray and the stewardess's wet fingers. He glanced up.

Outside, heavy strands of mist had begun to drift above the wings, temporarily blocking the sun. Looking down, he saw the black outline of the plane passing over the manicured rectangles of land.

Suddenly, sharply, the plane dropped like an elevator falling between floors. Then just as suddenly it stopped.

"Looks like we might be hitting some turbulence," he said. "Sure you've got a pilot up there?"

His attention returned to the window. Now darker clouds clotted the view, turning the window opaque so that he saw a reflection of his own face within the thick glass.

He heard a voice say something he did not understand.

"What?" he said.

"I said, that's funny," said the stewardess, "like an open grave."

A flash of brilliant light struck outside, penetrating the cloud bank. She stopped pouring the drink. He looked up at her, then at the tray. He noticed that her hands were shaking.

Then a dull, muffled sound from the back of the plane. Then a series of jolts that rattled the bottle against the lip of the glass. He thought he heard a distant crackling, like ants crawling over aluminum foil. Then the quick, shocking smell of smoke wafted up the aisle.

"Oh my God," whispered the stewardess hoarsely, "we've been —"

"I know," he said, strangely calm, "I know," *with tears of blood I tell you I know.*

The tray, ice and drink went flying, and then they were falling, everything falling inward and children, pillows, oxygen masks, bottles, the envelope he still clutched stupidly in his hand, the whole thing, the plane and the entire world were falling, falling and would not, could not be stopped.

IT WAS DUSK AS HE DROVE INTO THE DELTA, and the river, washed over with the memory of the dying red eye of the sun, seemed to be reflecting a gradual darkening of the world.

He wound down the windows of the rented car, cranking back the wind wings so that he could feel the air. The smell of seed crops and of the rich, silted undergrowth of the banks blew around him, bathing him in the special dark parturience of the Sacramento Valley.

He had been away too long.

And soon he would be back, away for a time from the practices of the city, which he had come to think of more and more lately as the art of doing natural things in an unnatural way — something he was afraid he had learned all too well. But now, very soon, he would be back on the houseboat; for a while, at least.

He did not know how long.

He would anchor somewhere near The Meadows. He would tie up to that same tree in the deep, still water, near the striped bass hole, hearing the lowing of cattle from behind the clutch of wild blackberry bushes on shore . . .

And this time, he dared himself, he might not go back at all. Not, at least, for a long, long time.

HE DROVE PAST THE WEATHERED, CENTURY-OLD MANSIONS left from the gold days, past the dirt roads marked only by rural mail-boxes, past the fanning rows of shadowy, pungent trees, past the

collapsing wooden walkways of the abandoned settlement towns, past the broad landmark barn and the whitewash message fading on its doors, one he had never understood:

HIARA PERU RESH.

He geared down and took the last, unpaved mile in a growing rush of anticipation. Rocks and eucalyptus pods rained up under the car, the wheel jerking in his hands, the shocks and the leaf springs groaning and creaking.

Then he saw a curl of smoke beyond the next grove and caught the warm smell of catfish frying over open coals. And he knew, at last, that he was nearing the inlet, the diner and the dock.

He braked in the gravel and walked down the path to the riverbank. He heard the lapping of the tide and the low, heavy knocking of hulls against splintered pilings. Finally he saw the long pier, the planks glistening, the light and dark prows of cabin cruisers rocking in their berths, the dinghies tied up to battered cleats, their slack, frayed ropes swollen where they dipped into the water, the buoys bobbing slowly, the running lights of a smaller, rented houseboat chugging away around the bend, toward Wimpy's Landing.

The boards moved underfoot as he counted the steps, head down, and he smiled, reminding himself that it would take a few hours to regain his sea legs. He reached the spot, a few yards from the end of the docking area, where he knew the *Shelley Ann* would be waiting.

He tried to remember how long it had been. Since the spring. Yes, that was right, Memorial Day weekend. Sometimes friends rode him about paying for the year-round space — why, when he used her only a few times each year? Even Shelley had begun talking that way in the last few weeks. *Cut your losses on that albatross!* She had actually said that. But at times like this, coming to her after so many months, he forgot it all. It felt like coming home. It always did.

He looked up.

The space was empty.

His eyes darted around the landing, but she was nowhere that he could see.

Unless — of course. She had been moved. That was it. But why? His boat had never been assigned any other stall for as long as he had owned her. Something had happened, then. But there had been no long distance call, no word in the mail; Old John would not be one to hide anything as serious as an accident. Would he?

He took a few steps, his hands in his back pockets, scanning the river in both directions.

He could just make out the diner/office/tackle shop through the

trees. A dim light was burning behind the peeling wooden panes.

Yes. Old John would know. Old John would be able to tell him the story, whatever it was.

Which was the trouble. Knowing him, it would take an hour, two. A beer, three beers, maybe even dinner. The lonely old man would not let him go with a simple explanation, of that he was sure.

And now he found he could think only of the *Shelley Ann*. He had waited and he had planned and he had come all this way, and at the moment nothing else seemed to matter. He needed to feel her swaying under him, rocking him. Now, right now.

Then. Everything. Would be. All right.

He stepped off the end to the bank, peering under the covered section of the landing, even though he knew that his boat would have been too large to clear the drooping canvas overhang.

He crouched at the edge, feeling suddenly very alone. The river smelled like dead stars. He watched the water purl gently around the floats and echo back and forth over the fine sand. A few small bubbles rode the surface, and a thin patina of oil shone with mirror-like luminescence under the dimming sky, reflecting a dark, swirling rainbow.

No stars were visible yet. In fact, the sky above the trees grew more steely as he watched.

He looked again at the water. He fingered a chip of gravel and tossed it. It made a plunking sound and settled quickly, and as it disappeared he found that he was straining to follow it with his eyes all the way down to the bottom.

He reached into his coat for a cigarette. His hands were still cold, and growing colder.

He felt the cigarette case and drew it out, along with something else.

He pushed a cigarette into his lips and stared at the envelope. It had no name and address on it. He couldn't remember —

He opened it, slipped out a neatly folded sheet of bond paper, unfolded it.

The leaves of the trees near him rustled, and then a light breeze strafed the water, tipping it with silver.

Still crouching, he fired up the lighter, lit the cigarette and squinted, trying to make out the words. It was written in careful longhand, a letter or — no. Something else.

He read the title.

The paper began to make a tapping sound. He held out his hand. Rain had started to fall, a light rain that danced on the river and left it glittering. As he blinked down at the paper, more drops hit the page.

The ink began to run, blurring before his eyes.

The lighter became too hot to hold. He snapped it shut and stood. He heard the rain talking in the trees, on the canvas tarpaulin, on the struts of the rotting pier.

His legs were cramped. He made a staggering step forward. His shoes sloshed the water. He stepped still further, led by the swinging arc of his cigarette tip in the darkness, until the rain found the cigarette and extinguished it.

He dropped it and moved forward, ankle-deep in the river. Is she really there? he thought.

Then he waded out into the low tide, the rain striking around him with a sound like musical notes, the melting paper still gripped in his hand, trailing the water.

DAZED, HE GLANCED AROUND THE BEDROOM.

The receiver was in his hand. By now the plastic had become quite warm against his palm. He stared at it for a moment, then returned it to his ear.

He heard recorded music.

Click.

"Thank-you-for-waiting-good-afternoon-Pacific-Southwest-Airlines-may-I-help-you?"

There was something he wanted to tell her. He had been trying hard to remember, but —

His eyes continued to roam the lower half of the room. Then he spotted the keys, the car keys, wedged between the bottom edge of the door and the pile of the carpet, as though they had been flung or kicked there with great force.

It started to come back to him. Shelley had done it. She had thrown the key ring with all her strength, a while ago. Yes. That had happened.

He raised his head at last, rubbed his neck.

And saw her, there on the other side of the bed.

She lay with eyes closed, hands at her sides, fingers clutching the bedspread.

He didn't want to disturb her. He modulated his voice, cupping the mouthpiece with his hand.

He told the maddeningly cheerful voice on the phone — it reminded him of a Nichiren Shoshu recruiter who had buttonholed him on the street once — to cancel one reservation. His wife was not ready, would not be ready on time.

Yes. Only one. That's right. Thank you.

He hung up.

He lifted the phone and replaced it on the nightstand.

On the bed, where the phone had been, was an envelope.

He picked it up.

It was empty.

There was a sheet of paper on the floor, where Shelley had crumpled and thrown it. That was right, wasn't it?

He smoothed it out on his knee.

It was written in a very careful, painstaking longhand, much more legible than his own. He started to read it.

At the end of the first stanza he paused.

Yes, it was something Shelley had found — no, she had had it all along, saved (hidden?) in her drawer in the nightstand. She had taken it out earlier this morning, or perhaps it had been last night, and had shown it to him, and one of them had become angry and crumpled it onto the floor. That was how it had started.

He read it again, this time to the end.

(1)

brown hair
curling smile
shadowed eyes
the line of your lips . . .
hair tangled
over me

(2)

warm skin
tender breasts
your mouth and
sweet throat . . .
hair moist
under me

(3)

there will be more
my eyes tell your eyes
than love of touch
face lost in my face . . .
do you know what lives
between our breathing palms?

(4)
twisted hair
seashell ear
soft sounds
stopped by my chest . . .
dark eyes sleep
while I speed to your heart

He turned to his wife.

It was true; she was beautiful. Whoever had written those words had loved her. He studied her intently until he began to feel an odd sense of dislocation, as if he were seeing her for the first time.

He looked again at the paper.

At the bottom of the page, following the last stanza, there was a name.

It was his own.

And in the corner, a date; almost fifteen years ago.

Quietly, almost imperceptibly, he began to cry.

For so much had changed over the years, much more than handwriting. He did not love her now, not in any traditional sense; instead, he thought, there was merely a sense of loving that seemed to exist somewhere between her and his mind.

As he sat there, he forced his eyes to trace the lines of her body, her face: the shrug of her shoulders, the sweep of her long, slender neck, the surprisingly full jaw and yet the almost weak point of the chin, the slight lips, the sad curve at the corners of her mouth, the smooth, even shade of her skin, the narrow nose, the nearly parallel lines that formed the sides of her small face, the close-set eyes, the thin and almond-shaped lids and delicately sketched lashes, the worried cast of her forehead and the baby-fine wisps at the hairline, the soft down that grew near her temples, the fuller curls that filled out a nimbus around her head, the hair bunched behind her neck, the ends hard and stiff now where the dried brown web had trickled out, just a spot at first but soon spreading onto the pillow after he had lain her down so gently. He had not meant it. He had not meant anything like it. He did not even remember what he had meant, and that was the truth. He had tried to tell her that, practically at the moment it had happened, but then it was already too late. And it was too late now. It would always be too late.

He lowered his head.

When he opened his eyes again, he was looking at the paper.

At the top of the page, perfectly centered, was the title. It said:

YOU CAN GO NOW.

He could see her now as the lights moved closer. He could see the milky whiteness of her skin. His hand dropped to the Army automatic in his belt, and he drew it out.

COP KILLER

by EDWARD D. HOCH

SOMETIMES IT SEEMED AS IF HE'D BEEN RUNNING all his life. Running from the black ghetto where he was born, and later running from the army that had forced him to serve in a war no one really understood. Then he'd come home, and started running from the police. This time perhaps he was running from himself, but there was no time to stop and ponder the best course of action.

It had happened suddenly — so suddenly that even Archie, back at the gas station, had acted out of sheer reflex. It was the fear of the gun, and the power of the gun, that every black boy was born with.

And now he was running again, down the dark, deserted streets of Bedford-Stuyvesant where nobody lived any more. It had never been his neighborhood, even as a child. In those days Harlem gangs rarely ventured more than a few miles from home, and the black areas of Brooklyn were a world away. It had never been home, and it was not home now. It was only a place to run, a place where he might be safe for a few more hours.

Behind him, at the intersection, he heard the screech of tires as a police car slammed on its brakes. They'd spotted him running, and soon now the block would be surrounded. "*Soldier!*" someone shouted, and that was him. He picked the nearest building and ran for it. "*Soldier! Stop or we'll shoot!*"

But they held their fire, because now he was in the shadow of the deserted building, hidden from view. He moved cautiously along the sidewalk, avoiding the pools of broken glass, searching for an open door. Finally, halfway down the block, an apartment house door lurched open at his touch. He went inside quickly, closing the door quietly behind him.

For a moment, the only sound he heard was his own breathing. Then, from outside, he could hear the distant shouting of the cops as they started moving in. His hand dropped unconsciously to the Army .45 tucked into his belt.

And then he heard it — the new sound.

It was the sound of a child crying, and it came from somewhere up the stairs of the deserted building.

SOME TWO MILES AWAY, DOWN ATLANTIC AVENUE where people still lived and worked and died, a boy named Billy Fox carefully wrapped a piece of cord around his right arm, just below the elbow. He waited, watching the veins of his arm until one of them stood out more than the others.

The deck of heroin, which Frank Lomelo had sold him earlier that evening for five dollars, was already open on the table beside him. The white powder was dissolving in water above the flame, almost ready for the needle. Watching it, watching the little bubbles in the liquid and the wisps of steam beginning to curl from the surface, he felt in complete control of himself for the first time in his life. Skin-popping heroin was one thing, but mainlining was something else. He'd heard the talk from the other guys — the bragging and the boasts, the dares he'd ignored till now.

Billy Fox loaded the hypodermic needle from the mixture on the bent tablespoon, tightened the cord around his arm one last time, and then plunged the needle into the skin, seeking the vein he'd chosen. It was good, as good as they'd told him it would be. He withdrew the needle, unwrapped the cord, and stood up. There was a smell of sweat and smoke and heroin in the room. It was a good smell.

He started out into the hall, and then it hit him. He staggered, tumbling into the stair railing, uttering a low moan that started deep inside him. What was it? What was happening to him? What . . . ?

He was on the floor by the stairs, and someone was bending over him. A ring of black faces surrounded him, and hands were trying to lift him. "Looks like an overdose," someone said. "Call an ambulance." He heard a woman scream, and knew it was his mother.

Another face came into view — it might have been his uncle — and a voice asked, "Where you get this shit, boy?"

"I . . ."

"Where you get it? Who sell you this shit?"

"Frank Lomelo . . ."

"Shoulda known!"

Billy Fox rolled over on the floor and lay there, sinking slowly into unconsciousness. He did not hear the ambulance men when they arrived, did not feel them lifting him roughly onto the stretcher.

"You the mother?"

"Yes."

"What's his name?"

"Billy Fox. He lives here with his uncle and me."

"How old is he?"

"He'll be fifteen next week."

SOLDIER HESITATED ONLY A MOMENT. The child above was crying, and that sound, if it continued, would be enough to bring the police to this building. He moved quickly up the stairs, two at a time, finding his way in the semi-darkness with an instinct that came with a lifetime of living in places like this. They were always the same — the stairs and the landings and the doors to other people's lives. Always the same.

A child's voice came from behind one of the doors. "Mommy, I'm tired. I want to sleep."

"Quiet now, dear. Stop your crying."

Then, from somewhere in the distant night, Soldier heard the growing wail of a siren. He could wait no longer. He stepped through the door into the bare room. "Don't make a sound," he said.

The woman, huddled with the child in the far corner, gave a gasp of fright. Then she was silent, and for a moment he thought she'd fainted.

"Mommy!" the child called out.

Soldier was at her side, shaking her. "You all right? I didn't mean to frighten you."

He saw her head move, but it was too dark to make out her features or her age. She seemed young, though, and her voice when she spoke was firm and strong. "Who are you?"

"You can call me Soldier. Most people do."

"What are you doing here, in my apartment?"

He chuckled a bit in the darkness. "Shit, lady, I didn't think it was anybody's apartment any more."

The woman in the corner bristled. "Don't use that sort of language in front of my daughter!" She turned her head to one side. "Sharon, are you all right?"

"I'm here, Mommy. On the floor."

"Stay down there." Her head turned back toward him. "My name is Daisy Grosso. This used to be my family's apartment, a long time ago."

Grosso? He turned the name over in his mind, trying to get a better look at the woman. Was she white? "That musta been a *long* time ago in this neighborhood!"

"It was eight years. Is that so long?" Then, as if in explanation, she added, "I'm only twenty-six."

"All right."

"You haven't told me what you're doing here, Mr. . . . Soldier."

"What do you want me to tell you? That I'm hiding from the police? That I've got a gun here in my belt?"

"Have you?" she asked with a gasp, and the terror was back in the room, hovering in the dark between them. From somewhere outside, the sirens came again. Perhaps they were closer, but he couldn't be certain.

Rather than answer her question, he went to the window. From here, above the street, he could see empty avenues lit only by the overhead lights, deserted but for the distant scurrings that seemed to grow nearer. They were gathering at the corner, beginning to search the buildings in the block.

"What are they doing down there?" she asked from behind him.

"Looking for me. They've got the block surrounded."

"You're really a criminal?"

"Criminal?" he repeated with a snort. "That's one name for it, lady."

"They'll find you here. There'll be shooting, and my daughter might be hurt! You should leave right now."

"They're searching the buildings one at a time. It'll take them an hour to get this far, and maybe they'll quit before that."

"You could get out the back way if you left now," she pleaded.

"They'd shoot me down the minute they saw me," he said, ending the conversation for the moment.

The woman named Daisy went back and sat on the dark floor beside

her daughter. He stayed by the window for some minutes, and presently she asked him, "Did you do something that bad?"

"What? Bad enough to be shot, you mean?"

"Yes."

"What's bad? Only something different from what other folks do."

"Not always," she replied after a moment's thought. "You're wrong about that."

He laughed. "I been wrong about lots of things in my life."

She sat in the dark, saying nothing.

THE AMBULANCE SPED THROUGH THE NIGHT, casting the red glow of its flashing light on the dark store windows along Atlantic Avenue. Hardly anyone looked up as it passed, because ambulances were nothing unusual in this section of Brooklyn on a Friday night. Even the fact that this one carried a fourteen-year-old boy suffering from an overdose of heroin would not have stirred wonder. There was nothing much unusual about that any more, either.

The ambulance driver, black like the boy, used the siren only occasionally as they passed through a red light or approached a busy intersection. He'd seen too many overdoses to treat this one with any special care. But once he turned to the attendant and asked, "Did you hear where he got the stuff?"

"Somebody said Frank Lomelo."

"That figures. The bastard!"

He pressed the siren button as they neared a busy intersection. After another few blocks, the attendant said, "We'd better hurry. He's gone into a coma."

"Shit!"

The driver maneuvered the ambulance around a stalled auto and turned down a side street. They were only two blocks from the hospital.

LATER, AS THE SOUNDS OF THE SEARCH GREW CLOSER, Daisy asked, "Are you really a soldier?"

He walked to the window, gazed down at the spotlight as it crawled along the line of boarded store-fronts across the street. They weren't sure yet just where he was. "I was once," he answered her. "They taught me to kill and sent me to Vietnam to shoot down a lot of women and children. It was bad, so after a while I just left."

"Deserted?"

He sighed, letting his breath escape in a long, low whistle. "I once read a book by a guy named Tolstoy. He says that military service corrupts a man, because it puts him in a position of idleness, free from

the obligations of humanity."

"You're awfully smart," she said, seeming impressed by his words.

"I read a lot when I was in the army. Never got a chance before, and there was all that idleness. It taught me about people. For a while I was going to be a teacher."

"You gave up war, but aren't you really at war now, against those police down there?"

"They're at war with me. I don't even know them." He moved back from the window as a spotlight beam crisscrossed the front of the building. "Tell me about yourself, lady. What are you doing here?"

"I told you — this was my apartment, a long time ago. Eight years ago I married Ralph Grosso and moved to California. Now I'm back."

"Without a husband?"

"That's another story, about Ralph. Some of my friends warned me about him, but I was only eighteen, and in love. We had some good years at first, and I've got Sharon."

"And where's Ralph?"

"In Mexico, I guess. One jump ahead of the police. He was in the rackets, and that was fine, but then he started fooling around with another woman. I didn't say anything, but her husband did. Ralph took a shot at him, almost killed him, and lit out for Mexico. Sharon and I had no place to go, except back here. There were too many bill collectors to stay in California."

"Tell me about the neighborhood. What was it like?"

"Lower middle class. A few blacks moving in. There were always children playing in the streets, and the water hydrants were open in the summertime." She seemed to be thinking back. "I guess it wasn't lower middle class at all. It was poor. We were poor."

"What's the little girl's name — Sharon?"

"Yes. Say hello to the nice man, Sharon."

Sharon lifted her head from the floor. "Lo."

Soldier went back to the window. "They're at the next building. They'll be here soon."

She came to his side again and looked out. They could see three patrol cars and policemen on foot gradually converging on the apartment building. One of the patrol cars had a loudspeaker which belted, "*Come on out, Soldier! We have the area surrounded!*"

"I'm afraid," Daisy said suddenly, as some of the reflected light from below caught the dark of Soldier's face. "I didn't know. When I left, the neighborhood was different."

"A lot of things were different eight years ago, lady." He could see her now, as the lights moved closer. He could see the milky whiteness

of her skin. His hand dropped to the Army automatic in his belt, and he drew it out.

"Are you going to kill us?"

"I never killed anybody, except in Vietnam, and I'm not going to kill you. There were enough women and kids over there — enough to last me a lifetime."

"The police will fire into the building when they know you're here."

"Don't worry. I won't let them hurt you or the girl." He went over to the floor where Sharon lay, and said a few soft words to her. He'd always liked kids, any color.

"If you didn't kill anybody, what did you do?" she asked.

"Nothing much. I ran away from the army and they been looking for me ever since."

"The gun . . ."

He sighed in the darkness. "I took it with me when I left camp."

"Why?"

"Why? I don't know why. Maybe I was tired of being kicked around all my life. Maybe a lot of things. Tonight I stopped at a gas station where a friend of mine worked. At least he used to be a friend. I asked for a handout, and he saw the gun in my belt and thought I was trying to rob him."

"Did you kill him?" She trembled a bit in the dimness, as if a shiver had run down her body.

"I told you no, didn't I? Just hit him, knocked him down. Then the cops were chasing me. Army deserter, gas station bandit, all that shit. I wrecked my car trying to get away from them, and I had to run in here."

"They've got a lot of men down there. They must think you're dangerous."

"Yeah. Well, I'm black, see. That makes a difference."

"Soldier," she said, "you can't keep running forever."

"Damn right! Sometime you gotta stop and fight back! Like right now."

The voice boomed out from below again. "*Soldier, come out!*" The police were just outside now, in the street, and he knew they'd find the unlocked door. The spotlight hit the window for an instant, reflecting off the walls, and Sharon started to cry.

"Stay down, darling. Don't go near the window!"

"I'm afraid, Mommy."

"I'm here. Nothing will hurt you."

"Will it be morning soon?"

She looked up at Soldier. "Not for a long time, darling."

THE AMBULANCE SKIDDED TO A HALT before the emergency entrance at Brooklyn Borough Hospital, and the attendants quickly wheeled the unconscious body of young Billy Fox inside. The nurse leaned over the counter and asked, "O.D.?" She knew the look of it.

"Yeah."

"Take him back, room F. The doctor will be right there."

The doctor was a young black man with hard brown eyes and an expression that never changed. He had seen it all, and nothing more was about to surprise him. He leaned over the boy, feeling for pulse, and then used his stethoscope. He drew one long breath and then straightened up. The ambulance driver saw it and paused in the doorway. "O.K., Doc?"

"Not O.K. You're about five minutes too late."

"Damn." The driver said it without real emotion.

"When will they learn, huh?"

The driver watched him cover Billy Fox with the sheet. "Maybe when Lomelo stops selling them that shit."

"Another of Lomelo's?"

"Sure."

The doctor shook his head. "Can't they do anything?"

"Who? Who's going to do anything about Frank Lomelo?"

SOLDIER HEARD THE FOOTSTEPS ON THE STAIRS BELOW. He went quickly to the door, gun ready, and whispered, "They found the open door. They're coming up."

"Where are you going?" Daisy asked.

"Out there. If I stay here, they'll find me and start shooting. You and the little girl might get hurt."

"What are our lives to you?"

He hesitated in the doorway, and heard the pounding of feet coming up the stairs. Closer now, on the landing below. Suddenly a flashlight beam pinned him on the wall, and a voice from below growled, "Now, you black bastard!" A bullet splintered the door frame by Soldier's head.

That was when Daisy screamed, and the unexpected sound of a woman's voice distracted the cop for the split second Soldier needed. He fired twice at a spot just above the flashlight. There was a gurgling cry and then a clatter, as the cop fell backwards down the stairs, his flashlight spinning off the walls.

"My God!" Daisy breathed. "Oh my God!"

"He's up here," someone shouted from below.

"Let's get the bastard! Bring in the tear gas."

Soldier listened to the voices, the gun hanging limp in his hand.

Suddenly Daisy was at his side. "There's a back stairs to the basement. Take it, and I'll tell them you went over the roofs."

"But —"

"Go on! Hurry!"

She led him to the stairs and showed him the way, then yanked open the door to the roof and started shouting. "Up here! He's gone up to the roof!"

He hurried silently down the back steps, thinking it was the first time a white woman had ever done anything good for him. Thinking it, and wondering why.

THE COPS CAME, QUICK BUT CAUTIOUS, pausing on the landing below as their flashlights circled the fallen patrolman. She could see his body, bloody and unmoving. He was a white man, and that made it all the worse.

Then they were on the landing with her, their questioning voices surrounding, penning her in. "Who are you, lady? His girl friend? Where'd he go?"

"Up on the roof. Get him!"

"Don't worry, we will. He's killed a cop now."

"Who are you, lady?" the first one asked again, seeing little Sharon come out of the apartment and stand sobbing by her mother's side.

"I used to live in this building, eight years ago. I just got in by bus from California, and I came out here to spend the night with friends, or at the hotel down the block. I didn't know the whole area was deserted."

"It sure is! Nobody lives here any more, lady."

She nodded. "But by the time I found out, it was dark, and Sharon was crying. So I came up here to my old apartment. Then . . . he came in."

"Nobody comes into these blocks at night if they value their lives. You're lucky to be alive."

"I guess I am," she said.

"Did he hurt you? Force you to stay with him?"

She was staring down at the policeman's body on the landing below. "Yes, I suppose so. It all happened so fast. He had that gun."

"Somebody will take you downtown, lady. We'll need a statement." There was a clattering from the roof, and one man shouted down, "No sign of him here, Sergeant, but he might be coming down through the next building."

"We'll get him," one of the cops said.

Daisy took a deep breath. "I hope so. He was a bad man." She tried not to meet their eyes. "A terrible man!"

As they went downstairs, edging past the body, Sharon asked, "Was he, Mommy? Was he really terrible? He seemed nice when he talked to me."

"Hush, dear."

"We'll need a statement," one of the officers said again, out in the street. "About how you came to be here and just what happened."

"Yes."

They helped her into a patrol car, and Sharon got in beside her. She stared up at the old building for a moment, and then turned away. The neighborhood had changed, and so had she.

"Don't worry, lady," a detective told her. "We'll get him. He killed a good cop. He killed Frank Lomelo."

Mike's Mail

PETUNIAS

Everyone in our office read and enjoyed *The What-If Twist* by Russell Newton Roman [MSMM, May 1980]. Funny detective stories are like petunias in onion patches! When can we expect MacDonald MacDonald to surface again?

Wilda Harrison
Ruth Zelman
Linda Griffith
Irving Young
Susan Williams
Gertrude Posalski
Carvin DiGiovanni
Alvin Lai

of the Safety, Health, Solar Energy and Medical Device Staff of the American National Standards Institute, Inc., New York, NY.

The author threatened to send us another one soon, but a writer's life is a hectic one and doing research with beautiful blond divorcees takes time.

Who did the thief think he was dealing with — some gas-head frosh whose brains were scrambled falling off the tailgate of a turnip truck? The irate Ruth Marie Stortini would show him otherwise!

CORRESPONDENCE WITH A BICYCLE THIEF

by JERRY JACOBSON

MAY 3RD

Dear Chesapeake College *Daily*:

Please publish this letter. If it is read by one particularly disgusting thief, or anyone thinking to perpetrate an act of thievery, perhaps it will give him pause to think.

I am addressing the poor, unfortunate cretin who stole my yellow, ten-speed Sekai 1000 from the Health Sciences Complex last Friday afternoon. Would you feel contrition to know you stole the bicycle of a poverty-stricken graduate student who hasn't the money to buy another? Likely not. You unconscionable, nickel-and-dime sneaks are ruled by instant gratification, blind greed and the theory of random selection.

Mine was a female's bike, with only a 19-inch frame. How miserably foolish you must look riding it. You have stolen my only means of inexpensive transportation. You have taken from me my mobility and my freedom. You belong back beneath the rock under which you were born.

I live thirty blocks from campus and because of your thoughtless, impetuous act, I must ride the bus, or walk. One will lose money I can ill-afford to spend. The other will lose time I cannot afford to waste.

Either way I lose.

Return my bicycle. I need it more than you. Leave it where you stole it, outside the Health Sciences Complex. No questions will be asked and no retribution by me or by the college authorities will take place.

Ruth Marie Stortini
405 North Campus Parkway
553-2001

MAY 5TH

Dear Ruth Marie Stortini, c/o Chesapeake College *Daily*:

I was deeply moved by your letter of two days ago in this column, so moved I felt compelled to reply to it. As a criminal-at-large, my anonymity must be preserved, but that does not prevent me from responding.

It was I who stole your Sekai 1000 from in front of the Health Sciences Complex. I found myself in need of transportation just then and when my discerning eyes saw that your Sekai was neither chained nor locked, I simply removed it from the glut of others and rode it off, ever the opportunistic don. My last three pairs of skis were acquired in that fashion. I was a lodge bum, and my market-place was the banked snow outside, where neophytes with new gear come in off the slopes for a break from the rigors, jam them into the snow with the rest and disappear inside. No one steals skis when everyone has his own pair. Unless, of course, someone is present who came up to the area *without* skis.

Who am I? *Rara avis in terris nigroque simillima cyncos*. If your Latin has fallen into disuse, that phrase translates, "A rare bird on earth and very like a black swan." No, I am not black. I have merely made a reference to the elegance and intelligence of the outcast, the superior being, the rare bird.

Your Sekai has an adjustable frame. It also has been repainted, though I regret its new color cannot be disclosed. And its serial numbers have been filed away and replaced with a fresh set. You have my gratitude, Ruth Marie Stortini, for making my campus not only a place of learning but a place for material profit as well.

You will also pardon me if I cannot wave to you as I ride past.

The Black Swan

MAY 7TH

Dear Despicable Black Swan, c/o Chesapeake College *Daily*:

What an abominable coward you are that you cannot even meet your victim face to face, but must skulk and hide behind the pages of a college newspaper. Not that you would be interested, but to buy that bike I worked five months in the greasy bowels of a university district restaurant. I put up with rude customers, a cheap, dirty-minded boss and belligerent fry cooks just to get low-grade transportation only to be stabbed in the back by a low-grade human like you.

You've taken some Latin. And since you vulturize the Health Sciences Complex, you must have taken some courses there. Are you perhaps a pre-medical or pre-dental major? Are you taking basic courses in one of the physical sciences? For you I can feel only sorrow and pity. You must have no friends. Likely you have thieved from or cheated all of those who might have become your friends.

Keep conversing with me, crud. You'll reveal your identity all in good time. Now, I don't just want my bicycle returned, you slob! I want you!

Ruth Marie Stortini
405 North Campus Parkway
553-2001

MAY 10TH

Dear Marie Ruth, c/o *The Daily*:

Such scornful rebuttal, Marie Ruth. You should learn to keep your rage in proportion to the offense. You guess me to be a pre-major who takes some classes at the Complex. Guess again. I am an Upper Campus regular, not one of those anemic, hunchbacked lost souls seen wandering Lower Campus with a bookbag jammed with dead frogs and untucked clothing reeking of formaldehyde. So far your detection is more faulty than a noseless dog smelling out fresh meat. The bike runs fine. The brakes needed readjusting a turn or two but aside from that it is a trouble-free machine, a real steal, if you will excuse the pun.

The Black Swan

MAY 12TH

Dear Detestable Black Swan, c/o *The Daily*:

My investigation leading to your ultimate arrest has begun, cheese-head.

I shall continue on the assumption you are, indeed, a Lower Campus student. You see, even an ignoramus like you would not travel far

afraid to steal a mere bicycle. You are an impetuous and expedient thief and therefore your crime was done in the area of your classes. Beginning to feel a little heat, jerk off?

The Department of Health Sciences has provided me with a list of all male undergraduates who are taking or have taken courses in the Complex. Graduate students have been eliminated as suspects. Anyone so stupid as to be a thief isn't likely to make it that far academically at a college whose standards are as high as Chesapeake's.

The campus police have given me a list of registered owners of bicycles. The names on this list have been stricken from my master list from Health Sciences, for obvious reasons.

Administration and Transcripts are presently compiling a computer print-out for me of all male students who have taken Latin in High School or at Chesapeake. Thanks to your unguarded bragging, Bozo, the names of these male students will constitute my initial prime suspects. Eliminated from suspicion among these, will be the high achievers whose grade-point-average is above three-point, or a B average. Why do I take such a risk? Well because, my charmless oaf, in your last letter you addressed me as Marie Ruth, reversing my first and middle names. So you can't be terribly bright.

I'm closing in, creep.

Ruth Marie Stortini
405 North Campus Parkway
553-2001

MAY 14TH

Dear Ruth Marie, c/o *The Daily*:

Dance away your little, half-baked theories, ballerina, because they will have you spinning in circles. Your dramatics and histrionics will draw you to no conclusions. You may pare your list down to a hundred suspects, but you will get no closer to my identity.

Your beloved Sekai needed a new book rack, making the bike even more difficult to identify. It sends you its love. Face it, Ruth Marie, you're definitely under the gun.

The Black Swan

MAY 16TH

Dear Lowlife Black Swan, c/o *The Daily*:

You egomaniacal loser, just who do you think you're dealing with? Some gas-head frosh whose brains were scrambled falling off the tailgate of a turnip truck? I am a graduate student who possesses a 3.75

g.p.a. and who will have her doctorate while the sad likes of you are still stumbling around in the stacks in the Undergraduate Library looking for a copy of *Moby Dick* and your left shoe.

I have no family here to help on my behalf. They live in the east. In Philadelphia, pal. And people from Philly can be dogged, and they can be bad. We can put the brotherly love bit aside anytime to jump up and down on somebody's head.

My mother is ill, and my father has spent all his adult lifetime sweating his butt off in a coke foundry to support five of us, so I'm not burdening them with my troubles and especially not with the theft of a \$200 bicycle. My father taught me to stand on my own two feet. He told me that I am blood of my mother's blood and flesh of my father's flesh . . . that I can out-think, out-wit and out-hustle anybody on the face of this earth if I used my brain.

You, my antagonist, are scarcely the sort of challenge my father had in mind, but momentary diversions have their function. Count on it, feebe, I'm on your case.

Ruth Marie Stortini
405 North Campus Parkway
553-2001

MAY 18TH

Dear Ruth Marie, c/o *The Daily*:

In your grief and loss, I didn't think you'd be trotting out your entire lower-middle-class history for this micro-community to read, Tch, tch, Ruth Marie, that's awfully bad form.

The bike still runs well. A great, little downhill machine with very little shimmy for all its light weight. Uphill: a bit of a drudge, but thieves shouldn't complain.

Come on now, Ruth Marie. Admit it publicly. This so-called cretin is more than a match for a dingy 3.75 g.p.a. grad broad whose intelligence has been compensated for all her life because she's female and a few ticks behind the male field when that old academic gun goes off.

The Black Swan

MAY 20TH

Dear Mouthy Black Swan, c/o *The Daily*:

Someone should have crushed that rock you were born under before you emerged from your shell to infect the honest world with your base

thievery. Someday you'll pay dearly for your dark deeds. And all your miserable life you'll be haunted that you're not much of a man, perhaps even impotent, and that you have no friends and that you are a hopeless coward. Let it stand at that, crud. Let me simply be grateful that I don't live inside your skin, nor in the tortured chamber of your infantile mind.

Ruth Marie Stortini
504 North Campus Parkway
553-2001

MAY 22ND

Dear Ruth Marie, c/o *The Daily*:

This will have to be my final response to your futile attempts to apprehend me. Boredom has crept in over your false starts and foolish, female amateur detective work. Finals are approaching. We will all be better acquitted if we concentrate on our studies, don't you agree? After finals, I am off for California for some sun and some fond reminiscences of our adversary relationship, our unmet correspondence. I plan on selling the Sekai for \$100 to some unsuspecting non-student who will be entirely unaware he is purchasing stolen property. I need turnover. I am liquidating.

It was clever of you to continue to allow your address and phone number to appear in *The Daily* with your letters, while you made every attempt to draw me out into the open with taunts and threats and ridicule about my intelligence and manhood. You expected they would bring me to rash moves. You were wrong. I remained completely away from your apartment and I did not try calling you on the phone. But I've passed by you literally dozens of times these last few days. On campus walkways, in lecture halls, in the Student Union, in shops and in beer and pizza joints in the district shopping plaza. How do I know what you look like? The spirit of inquiry, Ruth Marie. I have even had coffee at tables near to yours in the Student Union cafeteria, so close we could have reached out to shake hands without stretching.

I bid you goodbye, Ruth Marie. It's been an exhilarating experience. I've, alas, evaded your clutches completely and finally, *stans pede in uno*, without much effort.

Good luck with your exams. I'll try and send you some oranges from L.A. If you, of course, promise not to send me any sour grapes in return. Love ya, kid.

The Black Swan

STUDENT BICYCLE THIEF APPREHENDED

by Tod Greenly
Daily Staff Reporter

Nicholas DePalmer, 19, a Chesapeake College Sophomore, was arrested last night by local police at his apartment in the Dunbar Hill district. He was charged with the theft of a ten-speed bicycle owned by Ruth Marie Stortini, 24, a Chesapeake College graduate student and medical school candidate.

According to campus police, Ms. Stortini filed a theft complaint against DePalmer earlier in the day. The case was turned over to the local police when the investigation moved from campus jurisdiction. Based on evidence presented by Ms. Stortini, a warrant was issued for DePalmer's arrest. He offered no resistance.

Ms. Stortini accompanied police to DePalmer's address where she identified her stolen bicycle through a used steel bookrack recovered by her from a university district cycling accessories shop. The racks clamps could be matched with rust ridges on the bicycle's rear fender. DePalmer had repainted the bicycle black, but failed to sand down the ridges. Further identification was made from the bicycle's sliding frame which revealed a section of the frame painted yellow and a second distributor's serial number. Many dealers and distributors imprint a second code number to increase recoveries after thefts.

DePalmer is being held in the city jail in lieu of \$10,000 bail. At DePalmer's apartment police also recovered skis, cameras, stereo sets and speaker components also believed to be stolen by DePalmer.

MAY 25TH

Dear Fellow Students:

Many of you have been following the recent episodic correspondence in *The Daily's* Letters Column between myself and a hapless, cretinous bicycle thief calling himself The Black Swan. You have shared my loss, anguish and humiliation at his hands. Some of you have sent letters of encouragement and some of you have telephoned to cheer me up and to applaud my persistence. Thanks to you all.

I am now happy to report that The Black Swan was arrested the evening before last at his apartment on Dunbar Hill and was found to be in possession of my ten-speed Sekai 1000. The thief's name is Nicholas DePalmer, a sophomore pre-major who is now in jail, where he properly belongs.

Since these letters have developed into a kind of mini-whodunnit, it is only fair that you should know its final chapter.

As you may recall, in his pursuit I obtained a list of all male undergrads who were taking courses in the Health Sciences Complex. Stricken from that list were 1) legitimately registered owners of bicycles, 2) those without backgrounds in Latin and 3) undergrads with grade averages above 3-point. These eliminated suspects cut my list to 127.

It was my design all along to keep The Black Swan talking. What we say reveals much about ourselves. Clues to what we are creep into our speech unconsciously in a constant stream. It takes only putting the jigsaw pieces together.

Faced with 127 suspects, I began a close examination of what The Black Swan had to tell me in his letters. It was, to say the least, very revealing.

For instance, in his letter dated May 14th, he wrote, "Dance away your little half-baked theories, ballerina, because they will have you spinning in circles." An unconscious slip and a major one. And in the next sentence yet another unconscious faux pas: "Your dramatics and histrionics will draw you to no conclusions." Ergo, we are all victims of our pasts, held captive by our own special little set of cliches, and The Black Swan is no different. He was at one time a student of either drama or the dance. Whatta pantywaist, right? Dig it.

I took my list of 127 back to Transcripts Section and had it computerized for students whose records reflect courses taken in those pantywaist disciplines. Trimmed to 63 suspects.

Next we come to the unguarded reference to his whereabouts, in his letter of May 18th. "A great little downhill machine . . . Uphill: a bit of a drudge . . ."

Within a ten-mile radius of the campus there are only three hills steep enough to cause a biker trouble getting up them. Queen Anne, Commeaux and Dunbar. I returned to the Admin Building and ran my 63 suspects through for home addresses. Thirty-one of them lived on one of the three hills mentioned.

Next we encounter a virtual string of unconscious stumbles. In his May 14th letter, the phrase, "under the gun" and "a few ticks behind the male field when that old academic gun goes off," in his letter of the 18th. In that letter we also find the words "trotting out," and "bad form." And in the letter of the 22nd, the words "false starts." Right, he's a collegiate or former high school trackman, a runner.

And my list of suspects became reduced to 14.

And we now come to my *coup de grace*, this *nom de jerke's* penchant for Latin phrases. Admittedly, my Latin has been restricted to pre-med doses, but I can research like a beaver and hit the cross-reference card

files in the Undergraduate Library with the tenacity of a devil dog. That black swan phrase wasn't difficult to track down. It appears in Juvenal's *Satires*, of which the UGL has five copies, all circulating copies in varying degrees of disrepair. It is a volume not avidly sought these days by Chesapeake undergrads, even in translation. Except on five separate occasions by only one of my 14 remaining suspects. By Nicholas DePalmer.

The rest was a routine matter of placing what I knew and what I surmised into the hands of the campus police. The Black Swan was arrested forthwith.

My Sekai 1000 should be back in my hands shortly, after its use by city police as trial evidence is over. And if any of you out there find shortfalls in your personal property i.e., ski gear, cameras, stereos, I strongly urge you to make fast tracks downtown to Police Property Division (Public Safety Building, Fifth Floor) and claim what belongs to you before it has a chance to slip out the back door through public auction or charitable donation.

Bon finales, everyone.

Ruth Marie Stortini ○

Mike's Mail

HASTY BUT TASTY

Just a few hasty lines to express appreciation and thanks for the April edition of MSMM. The May issue already digested, so I shall enjoy the April copy until Mike makes his next appearance. Keep them coming!

Edith M. White
Eau Claire, Wisconsin

I'm glad you enjoyed the April issue despite the several sabotaged pages. More issues are on the way. Next month's (October) should be particularly interesting; it's the special "Crimes in Other Times" issue, which features Mike Shayne in Miami in 1943 battling saboteurs while his pregnant wife Phyllis goes into labor.

Also on hand for the future are several Major Lansing novelets and a variety of unusual short stories by new and by established writers.

*He had no hands and only one good eye — but his
chess game was deadly!*

THE OPPONENT

by EDMUND R. SHIELDS

CARL WAS A PATIENT PERSON. Perhaps that was why he was so fond of chess. Yes, chess was a fine game when one had a worthy opponent. *Thank heaven I'm a patient person*, thought Carl. *Otherwise I would have lost my mind ages ago.*

Carl walked to the window of his attic apartment and pushed it open wide. Birds sang in the early morning stillness. The scent of blossoms drifted in on the fresh spring breeze. *How fortunate I've retained my sense of smell*, thought Carl breathing deeply. *Yes, and how fortunate to have found an apartment directly across the street from 4218 8th Ave. N.E.* The house across the street looked so quiet now. The lawn neatly trimmed, the somber sedan parked at the curb. Everything was in order.

But soon, Carl thought, *but soon . . .* Carl's heart stopped as the door of 4218 began to open. A man emerged wearing a conservatively cut

blue serge suit and carrying a trim attache case. *Ah, yes, Carl thought, he even looks like a chess player. But will he use the car?*

Step by step the man traveled the walk from the front door to the curb. Carl could not breathe. His single good eye was riveted on the man as he reached the curb, then turned and walked up the street away from house and car. *Oh well, thought Carl, he seldom drives to work anyway. But I thought today perhaps . . .* The thought trailed off unfinished as Carl braced himself on the window sill while his respiration returned to normal. When his thoughts resumed, he assured himself that a patient man could afford to wait.

Carl started at the sound of his landlady's voice trilling from downstairs.

"Mr. Vodkin, oh Mr. Vodkin, are you awake yet?"

"Yes, Mrs. Hernstadt, I'm awake." *What a sturdy old soul, thought Carl, so willing to accommodate the handicapped.* Carl listened as she clumped steadily up the stairs. She rapped lightly at the door and stuck her rosy old face in without waiting for an answer.

"Would you like your breakfast now, Mr. Vodkin? The iron's hot, and I could have waffles in about two shakes."

"That sounds wonderful, Mrs. Hernstadt."

Mrs. Hernstadt's face crinkled in a conspiratorial grin.

"Shall I bring it up here on a tray for you, Mr. Vodkin? It wouldn't be any trouble."

"Why, yes, Mrs. Hernstadt, thank you very much. There is a chess problem I was going to work on and that would be most convenient."

Mrs. Hernstadt crinkled her face again and clumped back downstairs. *Dear Mrs. Hernstadt, thought Carl, a stalwart member of that loyal and dogged breed forever needing someone to care for. Willing to wait on me hand and foot merely because I have no hands and only one good eye. How fortunate to have found her living right across the street from 4218.*

Carl raised his arms to the window. As always, he was a trifle taken back to see the complex set of mechanical hooks and clasps that had taken the place of his hands. They looked as though they belonged to some pre-historic flying reptile or some sophisticated new mechanism designed for exploring outer space. Now he was able to use them quite proficiently. The therapists had been a tremendous help, but he had been able to transcend their teaching with his own extraordinary patience and cunning. In a way, they were better than real hands. He used them for many things that would have hurt mere flesh and bone. Of course, there were those operations requiring a sensitive

touch that were lost to him now. It almost balanced out. Almost, but not quite.

Carl walked over to his closet, removed his folding card table and returned to the window to set it up. When it was securely on its feet, he set a chair beside it so that seated he would have an unobstructed view of the house across the street. Then he went back to the closet for his chess set. It was a fairly expensive set, a present from his mother, of the style whereby the board folded in the middle, creating a chest to hold the pieces. He made sure it was securely anchored in his claws before walking with it. The pieces were carved of delicate stone and he would never forgive himself for breaking one. When it was safely on the table, he returned to the closet for an old shoe box. Though the contents of this box were not fragile stone, he carried it with no less a sense of reverence. Once back at the table, he seated himself and began to set up the chess board. The placing of each piece on its appropriate square was a miniature task in itself, requiring its own bit of intense concentration. He was nowhere near finished when he heard Mrs. Hernstadt on the stairs.

"Don't bother getting the door, Mr. Vodkin, I can manage just fine," she called.

Carl had no intention of offering aid.

Mrs. Hernstadt fumbled through the door bearing a folding tray loaded with food. She placed it before him as though it were a sacrificial lamb. He scooted away from the card table and said:

"Could you move it nearer the window, please? I enjoy the view while I eat."

"Of course." Mrs. Hernstadt bustled to accommodate.

"It smells wonderful, Mrs. Hernstadt," he said, smiling up at her beaming face. Her eagerness to please was starting to make him uneasy. He braced himself for the ordeal of manipulating the silverware, one of the harder things to do. He wouldn't have bothered with it at all if Mrs. Hernstadt hadn't been there. With a fork precariously pinched in his surrogate fist he made an ineffectual stab at a stack of waffles. Mrs. Hernstadt's face became a well of pity and compassion.

"If you need any help, Mr. Vod-" she began.

"No, no, Mrs. Hernstadt," he cut her off, struggling to keep his tone civil, "I'll be just fine. Nothing I can't handle here. I'll be just fine."

"It certainly wouldn't be any trouble for me . . ."

"No, Mrs. Hempstadt, I wouldn't hear of it. I'm certain you have better things to do than to help me eat my breakfast. You just go back on downstairs and do whatever you were doing. I'll be fine."

"Well, only if you're sure."

"I'll be fine, I'll be fine," he said, shooing her away with his mechanical claw.

She paused at the door to crinkle a smile at him and say:

"Now remember, if you need anything at all I'll be right downstairs."

He tried his best to smile, but could not until she had left. *Pesky old dunce*, he thought, restraining the urge to fling the fork to the floor, knowing the sound would bring her racing back up. *How fortunate that she's a heavy sleeper and it's relatively easy to slip out of the house at night*. He let his gaze shift to the house across the street.

Unburdened by utensils, Carl began to savor his meal. He kept one claw clean and with it reached for the shoe box he had brought from his closet. He knocked the lid off and pulled out a neatly bound packet of letters. Here it was. The longest game of chess he had ever played. All of his opponent's moves, that is. All but the last one anyway. For it had been a game of chess by mail and Carl had no idea what his opponent had done with the moves he had sent. It didn't matter. Carl had long since memorized every move he had made in that game. He could still see that fateful ad in the chess magazine.

*Play chess by mail. Send us your name
and address and one dollar, and we'll
match you with a buff in another city.
Months of suspenseful fun.*

"What a trifle to become the turning point in my life," Carl mused bitterly.

Carl set the letters aside and finished his breakfast. He wished he could call Mrs. Hemstadt to come and get the tray, but he knew that she would be more trouble than it was worth. So he carefully pulled it to the center of the room, making as little noise as possible. He walked back to the window and paused there before returning his card table to its original position.

The sun was higher in the sky now. It was going to be a warm day. The street was as still as death. Only the birds sprinkled the air with occasional bursts of song. *A perfect day for daydreams*, Carl thought, letting the sun's warmth hit him on the face. Suddenly he sensed a movement on his blind side and spun to see what it was. It was only the mailman a few houses up the block. At the next house a dog bravely hailed the man's arrival. Other dogs chorused in breaking the street's

silent spell. The postman strode up to 4218 and deposited a letter in the box. *Perhaps he's playing chess again*, Carl thought. *I wonder if his game has improved.*

Carl watched the mailman until he rounded the corner at the end of the block. The street became deathly still again. *I suppose I shall have to visit the washroom now*, Carl thought, not looking forward to it. That meant going downstairs and having to deal with Mrs. Hernstadt again. Still, the trip was a prerequisite to making it through the long day ahead.

Carl moved to the door and opened it as quietly as possible. He stood at the top of the stairs listening for Mrs. Hernstadt, hoping he would be able to avoid her. When he heard nothing for several seconds, he started downward at a light, quick pace. He reached the bottom undetected. A short hallway branched to the left of the stairs. Straight ahead at the end of the hall was the door to the kitchen. Just before that on the left side was the washroom door. Mrs. Hernstadt would undoubtedly be in the kitchen. Carl soundlessly approached the washroom door. His claw made a clanging noise as his first attempt at turning the knob failed.

"Is that you, Mr. Vodkin?" Mrs. Hernstadt called. "Do you need any help?"

Carl heard a chair scuff on the kitchen floor and knew help was on the way. He made another grab for the knob and this time managed an entry. When he was safely inside he called:

"I'm just using the washroom, Mrs. Hernstadt, but I've finished eating and you can get the tray from my room if you like."

Mrs. Hernstadt reached the hallway and was standing with her ear close to the washroom door. "Oh, yes, the tray," she said, "I'll get the tray, but if there's anything at all you need be sure to call, Mr. Vodkin. I couldn't bear the thought of you hurting yourself trying to do something I could've just as easily helped you with."

Carl thought she sounded a bit too anxious to help him in the washroom and waited until he heard her on the stairs before getting down to business.

After he had relieved himself and was doing up his pants, he marveled at how easy it was to manage pliable things. Zippers and snaps were really no trick at all as long as they were attached to something soft and flexible. Belts and buttons were out of the question, of course, but these days he wore suspenders and most of his shirts closed with those fuzzy strips that clung to each other. He could even tie his shoes with a clever little slip knot the therapists had shown him.

The therapists had spent a good deal of time teaching him how to

dress himself, and pliable things really gave him no big problem. It was the solid things, the silverware and the chess pieces, the door-knobs and latches that were hard to handle. Feeling was definitely necessary with solid things. There was no way to get any leverage with the solid things, no way to take up any slack or manipulate them. That old car hood had been a bit of a problem too. He had been deathly afraid he was making too much noise banging about in the middle of the night, but no one had stirred for blocks around. How fortunate that 8th Ave. N.E. was such a quiet street.

He drew a basin of water without looking in the mirror above the sink. With a damp washcloth he concentrated on cleaning the claw he had used for eating: *Mustn't get my chess pieces and letters soiled*, he thought. When the metal was clean, he opened the stopping mechanism and watched the water swirl out of the sink. Then he just stared down at the empty sink, still avoiding a confrontation with the mirror that was directly in front of him.

He heard Mrs. Hernstadt clumping her way back to the kitchen. After unburdening herself of the tray, she returned to the washroom door.

"Everything all right in there, Mr. Vodkin?" she called.

"Just fine, Mrs. Hernstadt," Carl sighed, "just fine."

"Well, I must say you certainly do have a good appetite, Mr. Vodkin. You did extremely well with your breakfast. Now, just let me know what you want for lunch and when you're ready for it, I'll bring it right up to you."

"Mrs. Hernstadt, I really don't think I'll want any lunch today. That breakfast filled me to the brim. I think I'll just review a few chess problems, then maybe read and nap for awhile. I'm quite sure dinner will be soon enough for my next meal."

"Well, if you're sure," Mrs. Hernstadt said, unable to conceal her disappointment. "Be sure and let me know if you change your mind." She retreated to the kitchen.

Carl began to lift his gaze from the sink. Slowly his head rose until finally the mirror reflected his own strange face. The face he could not quite get used to seeing as he could not quite get used to seeing the metal claws instead of hands.

Once he had considered himself to be fairly good looking. Now a black eye patch obscured the upper right third of his face hiding an empty, useless socket as well as other raw-looking burn scars. Other smaller scars showed on the rest of his face, seeming to grow more livid against a complexion that grew paler every day. His mouth was compressed and mirthless. The other fleshy areas of a once round

and happy face had been pinched and shorn away by pain and bitterness. His good eye was cold and dead and unyielding. It took a tremendous act of will for Carl to restrain himself from smashing the mirror. Hot tears of self pity welled in his eye before the spell passed and he was able to go upstairs.

Once back in the attic Carl's mood began to improve. To him it was a sanctuary. Up here he was in control. He felt no need to achieve normalcy.

He seated himself at the table by the window. Mrs. Hernstadt had finished setting up the chess board for him, the meddling old fool. He put Mrs. Hernstadt out of his mind and settled down to savor his chess game.

He picked the first stack of letters out of the shoe box and undid the slip knot that bound them together. His old home address was printed neatly in the center of the first envelope. "Mr. Carl Vodkin, 4711 W. Yale Ave., Denver, Colorado, 80236," it read. A return address in the upper left hand corner read: "Mr. Martin Dunbar, 4218 8th Ave. N.E., Seattle, Washington, 98105." The postmark read: "13 Nov. 1976." *It's taken me a long time to get here, Mr. Dunbar, but I'm here now just watching and waiting. It's been a long, long game,* thought Carl.

The letter contained a single sheet. A brief note of introduction and the chess move. Carl read the move, moved the appropriate piece and made his own corresponding move. Then he replaced the letter and reached for another. This one was postmarked Nov. 18. *Remember how it was,* thought Carl, *remember that first day.*

In his mind he saw himself as he had been nearly three years ago. He'd had hands to reach into the mailbox then and two good eyes to see that there was only one letter that day. He knew at once it was the opening chess move because he hadn't been corresponding with anyone else, and bills and junk mail did not come addressed in long hand. He had immediately taken it to his bedroom where on a small end table away from everything else he had set up a chess board. It was almost like a shrine sitting there, isolated, to be disturbed only when a message was received in the mail. He remembered thinking to himself that it was all rather mad.

As soon as he had dutifully moved his opponent's man he had countered as cleverly as he could, then grabbed his stationery and pen to record the action. He remembered how prompt and polite they had been in those first few weeks. Always the courteous little introductory notes before each move, always promptly replying with the next move the same day.

Then Carl got to pondering the situation. A good part of winning any

competition came in the psyching-out of one's opponent. Was it possible to psych-out someone through the mail? And if so, how? It was at this point that Carl had decided to quit accompanying his moves with introductory notes. From then on his letters contained as brief and as terse a description of the move he wanted to make as possible. That was it. Before long, Mr. Dunbar had followed suit.

Soon after, Carl had ceased to be so prompt in sending his moves. Sometimes he waited a day, sometimes as long as a week before sending them and never with any apology or explanation, Mr. Dunbar had not copied the technique. He continued to respond to Carl's moves the same day he received them, regardless of how long Carl had procrastinated.

This had encouraged Carl, especially since it was at this point that he had started to gain the upper hand. Granted, the advantage had been slight and the game far from over, but Carl had felt strangely exhilarated during those weeks. It had given him enormous pleasure to pause during his daily life and think about the chess game he was winning through the mail.

As he remembered, Carl re-enacted the chess game on the board in front of him. Each letter that he opened and read was like a sign on the road of his past.

He remembered the first anniversary of the game and how incredible it had seemed that a chess game could last for so long. Even then the end had been nowhere in sight. Yet Carl's confidence had grown with every move. He had begun to feel that he was dominating the game and had even resumed mailing his moves promptly as a display of confidence. They had been playing long enough so Carl was able to discern that Dunbar had a very predictable style of play. Carl had even been able to plan complex gambits well in advance and Dunbar had consistently fallen into them. The idea of slowly springing these traps over long periods of time had been exquisitely delicious to him.

Then, inexplicably, the tide had begun to turn. In rapid succession he lost some valuable pieces that he thought were in no danger. His confidence began to erode. By falling for his gambits, had Dunbar merely been luring him into a larger more complex gambit of his own? Carl didn't know, but the thought left him with a sick, weak feeling. Before long the game had been restored to an equal stance.

Desperate to regain lost ground, Carl immediately re-implemented his old psych-out technique. It was the only thing he had been doing differently during his winning streak.

Then a new inspiration hit him in a flash.

He had written Dunbar a letter explaining that his chess board had been accidentally knocked over and could Dunbar please send him a diagram of the game to date so that they could continue. Nothing whatever had been wrong with Carl's board. As usual, Dunbar had replied promptly. Carl compared the diagram to his own board and had found it to be totally accurate. He then wrote Dunbar another letter. He had not actually accused Dunbar of cheating. Instead, he had innocently inquired if certain pieces had not been on certain different squares. Dunbar's reply had indignantly insisted that the diagram was accurate.

The cheap little ploy had made Carl feel diabolically clever. The game even seemed to swing his way a bit.

Next, Carl sent a move and then the very next day sent another letter with a different move saying that he had made a mistake and could Dunbar please disregard the first letter. By the time the second letter had arrived, Dunbar had already answered the first. The second letter offended him. He promptly wrote back that it was of course impossible to change a move once it was in the mail, sarcastically adding that this should be especially true if one were going to ponder his moves so long before sending them. All this had gone exactly according to Carl's plan. To cap things off, Carl waited a full two weeks to resume play.

By the middle of the summer of seventy-eight, Carl had the game completely under his control. He had been able to identify and capitalize on one of his opponent's chief weaknesses. Dunbar had an orderly, systematic, almost machine-like mind. Disruptions and distractions put him off and Carl's style of play had been much more important in gaining the upper hand than skill or knowledge of the game.

At this stage, Carl had been able to place Dunbar in check with every move. All of Dunbar's important pieces were gone and he had virtually no chance to get one of his few remaining pawns over to Carl's side of the board. Once again Carl had started to mail his moves promptly. Dunbar was obviously doomed, and the itch to finish the game had infected Carl. He couldn't understand why Dunbar didn't just concede. Yet, he had relished those last weeks and had experienced a sense of triumph totally disproportionate to the feat he had accomplished.

Finally, there was only one move left for Dunbar. Carl had been incredibly anxious to receive that last letter. He had his own final move written and ready to send with the triumphant word, "Checkmate," glowing at the end.

Carl remembered every detail of the day Dunbar's last move arrived. It was August 23, 1978. After an ordinary day of work, Carl drove home

hoping to find the letter he'd been waiting for in his mailbox. The warm late summer sun was low in the sky, and the quiet street Carl lived on was buzzing with the activity of others arriving home from work. He checked his mailbox and there it was. He removed the letter and noticed immediately how odd it felt. It was much bulkier than all the previous letters. Carl remembered thinking that perhaps Dunbar was sending him a congratulatory prize or something. He took it inside. He shook it and held it up to the light. He opened it from the top. It clung together almost as though it had been glued shut. He tried to pry it open, holding it close to his face. Then there was that funny tearing sound, the blinding flash and the force of a staggering blow knocking him unconscious. The next thing Carl remembered was the hospital. He came to terribly frightened not knowing where he was. His stomach struggled with nausea, and his head pounded like a jackhammer. For some reason, he couldn't see properly, couldn't quite focus, and his face and arms itched terribly. But he couldn't scratch. His arms were strapped to the bed and he couldn't scratch.

Then came the doctors:

"... you've had a terrible accident ... had to amputate both hands ... one of your eyes is gone ... Just remain calm ... with modern technology and theraputic technique you'll be able to live a full and productive life."

Then came the police:

"... any idea who'd want to send you a letter bomb? ... Who had you been corresponding with? ... Were you trying to blackmail someone? ..." and on and on endlessly. "... any idea ... who ... why ... what were you doing?"

Carl hadn't told them a thing. Especially when he found out that another letter containing a chess move had arrived the day after the explosion. Mr. Dunbar had covered his tracks. But Carl knew. Carl would take care of Mr. Dunbar.

The road to rehabilitation had been slow and tortuous. Day by day he went over the same old tedious routines. He was like a boy again, slowly learning to perform the daily tasks of life with mechanical hands. Every time his patience wore thin, he thought of Dunbar. At times he got the irrational feeling that more than anything he'd like to feel his hands on Dunbar's throat. Hands he no longer had. Hands Dunbar had taken from him. Knowing his wish would never come true, he knuckled under to the therapy. After six months he was released.

He never found the cover letter Dunbar had sent. He thought perhaps the police had it, but he never asked them. The other letters he bound carefully and placed them in a shoe box. The chess board was

left exactly the way it was. Carl settled down to practice. He practiced with the wire and the funny little alligator clips. He practiced with doors and car hoods. He practiced and practiced until he was positive he had everything down. Then he moved to Seattle.

Carl returned slowly from his memory trip. He'd been virtually in a trance, the natural effect one would expect on a warm August day. He looked out the attic window at the house across the street. The sun was sinking lower in the sky. Here and there a person was arriving home from work. *I've been sitting here all afternoon*, Carl thought, slightly amazed. He looked down at the chess board sitting on the card table in front of him. All the letters were back in the shoe box. He'd read every one and made every move. All but the last two, that is. And for those he'd have to wait. Maybe tonight, maybe tomorrow morning. Anytime now, anytime.

A figure wearing a blue serge suit and carrying an attache case appeared at the top of the block. Carl followed the figure's progress down the block and to the door of 4218. *Home from work*, Carl thought. *Home from work*.

Carl stood and leaned on the window sill. His single eye blazed as he watched the house across the street, waiting to see if his opponent would emerge again soon. *Go out for dinner*, Carl's brain chanted, *go out for dinner*.

A half hour passed. Somewhere back in the far recesses of his consciousness Carl heard Mrs. Hernstadt clumping up the stairs.

"Mr. Vodkin, oh Mr. Vodkin," she called; "it's getting on towards dinner time."

Carl barely heard her and made no move to answer. The door of 4218 opened. Carl's heart skipped.

"Mr. Vodkin, are you all right?" Mrs. Hernstadt queried, as she entered the attic room to see Carl standing motionless before the window.

Carl's claw found Dunbar's king on the chess board as Dunbar moved down the walk toward the car at the curb. *He is, he's taking the car*. Carl's mind trumpeted.

Carl moved the chess piece just as Dunbar climbed into the car.

"Mr. Vodkin?"

Mrs. Hernstadt cautiously approached Carl from behind. She craned her neck to see over his shoulder out the window. She was just in time to see a sheet of flame engulf the car across the street. A tiny gasp escaped her lips, and she fainted. Carl was oblivious to her.

"Check and mate," he said aloud, smashing his claw triumphantly on the chess board.

The man had died in a way that was far from pleasant. So why was there an unmistakable grin on his face?

THE SMILING CORPSE

by LEE G. MOLER

VERY FEW PEOPLE DIE WITH SMILES ON THEIR FACES. Art Farmer had been with the Los Angeles Police Department for twenty-five years, and the only one he could remember was a man with too many responsibilities who had been shot in the head. *Funny that a head wound would do that*, he had thought at the time. *Must be some kind of high.*

This one hadn't been shot in the head or anywhere else but there it was, a smile as unmistakable as it was slight; like the owner had just filled an inside straight.

Farmer was in the basement of *Good Hope Hospital* puffing his pipe while talking to his good friend, Chief Pathologist J.J. Christopher. J.J. was another West Virginia boy who had come west after World War II in search of sunshine and starlets but found instead a career. The two had met on Farmer's first case as a homicide detective. During the intervening twenty-five years they had become good friends while kidding each other about all the dead people they knew in common.

Now there were only ten days left to continue the professional aspect of that friendship. Art Farmer had just finished his retirement physical and was feeling like an old car about to be declared unsafe for freeway

use. The Department had sent a young psychologist around a few days before, who informed him that it wasn't uncommon to feel depressed at the prospect of retirement. Nice to know, but it didn't change the fact that he was depressed. Farmer had stopped by to see J.J. because he had a way of seeing the funny side of any situation; a faculty of considerable value to a doctor whose only patients were dead.

It was while the two of them were standing in the hall discussing the relative merits of a smog festival or felons' golf tournament as an initial retirement project that the body was wheeled around a corner.

"You ever see anything like that?" Farmer asked his friend.

"Seems like it," J.J. replied, "but I can't remember when."

The corpse was followed within a few seconds by a young man wearing a Pierre Cardin sport coat, brown slacks, and Gucci loafers.

"You the attending physician?" asked J.J.

"Right. Dr. Manet. Lyman Manet."

"Who's this?" J.J. jerked a thumb toward the man with the smile.

"Edward Janus, cronic emphysema. I inherited him when Dr. Richardson retired last year. There's no need for an autopsy. I only brought him here because the family requested he be removed quickly."

Farmer was admiring the cut of Dr. Manet's tweed when the name Janus suddenly registered. "Edward Janus, Janus Construction Co. Right?"

"Right," Manet answered.

"That's a very rich body lying there, gentlemen." Farmer relighted his pipe as he spoke. "I didn't think he had a family. I thought he never married."

Manet was in a hurry. "One brother and a sister-in-law," he said quickly. "They'll be here in an hour or so." The immaculate Dr. Manet seemed a trifle relieved to be rid of a patient untidy enough to have a chronic disease. "Here's the death certificate." He handed the form to J.J. "I've already signed it, cause of death congestive heart failure secondary to chronic emphysema. If the brother doesn't show up within a couple of hours, just phone my service and we'll make some temporary arrangements." With that he walked briskly toward the exit sign.

"Seemed all broken up about losing his patient didn't he, J.J.?"

"Well, Art, you know the guy did have emphysema; it only gets worse."

"Is that so?" Farmer sucked thoughtfully on his cold pipe. "Tell me about it, briefly and with as little Latin as possible please."

J.J. was tall and with his deep baritone and horned rim spectacles

could be very professional. He enjoyed playing the role of instructor to his more simian friend. "Okay," he began, "in laymen's terms the lungs are made up of millions of tiny sacs called alveoli. Air is drawn into these alveoli where it gives up its oxygen to the blood by diffusion through a membrane. At the same time carbon dioxide from the blood diffuses the other way into the alveoli and is expelled from the body when a person exhales. This process is controlled by two centers. One in the brain which responds to a rise in carbon dioxide and makes you breathe and other peripheral centers which respond to a drop in blood oxygen level. It's all very neatly worked out except that in order for it to happen the alveoli have to expand to suck in air and contract to exhale it. That's why your chest goes up and down. Are you following me so far?"

"Just like the simple layman I am."

"Okay, good. What happens in emphysema is that the alveoli expand but they don't contract. Physiologically this is known as high lung compliance. Well, what happens eventually is that your lungs get to be like a limp old bag instead of a balloon. This results in trapping stagnant air, a lower-than-adequate blood oxygen level and correspondingly high carbon dioxide level."

Farmer searched meditatively through his pockets as he spoke. "Then what happens is the guy suffocates, right?"

"Very good," said J.J. "You're right, he would — except that heart failure usually gets him first. Since the blood doesn't have enough oxygen, the heart has to work harder to get what is there out to the body tissues. This results in an enlarged heart with a weakened stroke. The blood isn't pumped with enough force, it backs up, and the heart strangles on it."

Farmer shook his head slowly. "Sounds like a real rough way to go."

"It is, and there's more of it all the time, caused by smog and smoking," J.J. said, nodding ominously toward Farmer's pipe.

"I've got just one more question." He ignored the reference to his pipe, staring hard at the corpse instead. "If emphysema's such a hard way to go, why is this man smiling?"

J.J. answered the question with only raised eyebrows and a shrug.

In a split second Farmer ceased being good old Art and became Captain Arthur Farmer, L.A.P.D. "J.J.," he said, stuffing his pipe in his jacket pocket, "I don't want that body to go anywhere yet. I can order you to hold it, pending a request for autopsy."

"Sure thing, Art, but I'll have to go to the coroner with more than a smile."

"Just don't do anything until I talk to the brother."

Roger Janus was a tall, well-groomed man who arrived dressed in golfing outfit and sporting a Palm Springs tan. He seemed slightly more troubled by his brother's death than Dr. Manet, but was accepting it with the guilty relief of a yawning host who shows you to the door while asking you not to leave. One of the worst things about a lingering disease is that it lingers so long.

Janus ran manicured hands through his thick silver hair while studying the toes of his shoes. "Poor Ed, it's probably for the best though."

"Why's that?" asked Farmer, noticing the odor of a midmorning Martini rising from Janus direction.

"Oh, didn't you know, he had emphysema. It's a wasting disease. When you have it you can't breathe. It gets worse and worse. It was terrible watching Ed gasping for air. You've never seen it?"

"No," replied Farmer, "can't say as I have. What's it like? I mean, what is it exactly?" Janus followed with an explanation paralleling J.J.'s. When he was finished, he looked at Farmer expectantly. "So you can see, Captain Farmer, why I'm not too disturbed by Ed's death. It's a blessing in a way."

"Sure, Mr. Janus, I can understand how you feel, and I kind of admire you for taking the trouble to find out so much about your brother's problem."

Janus shrugged. "Oh, it wasn't much trouble. I made so many visits to the hospital to see Ed that I couldn't help picking up some information."

After Janus had formally identified the body and left, Farmer dialed the office and had two squad cars sent to Edward Janus' address with instructions to seal it off. "No one goes in," he said to the sergeant. "Not the doctor or the brother, no one unless I say so, understand?"

"Sure, Art," said the worried voice on the other end, "but it doesn't sound to me like we can call it a homicide investigation."

"We can close it pending autopsy to determine cause of death."

"Art, the man had a chronic disease. What basis do we have for . . ."

"The basis that I told you to. I'm the Captain, remember?"

"Okay, it's your neck."

A satisfied smile spread across Farmer's rugged face. "That's the beautiful part about it," he said. "It's nobody's neck. I'm retiring in ten days. Now get those cars out there."

THE JANUS HOUSE WAS A LOW, FLAT EXPANSE OF GLASS and steel which sat atop a wooded ridge with the sleek bulk of an aircraft carrier in drydock. The inside was a place the owner obviously considered home office rather than home. The teakwood floors and kangaroo-hide furniture were immaculate but devoid of wear. The only part of the complex structure with a stamp of personality a house usually carries like a fingerprint was a small oak building adjoining a lake-sized swimming pool.

Inside the rough hewn bungalow were a den with stereo, desk, blueprint rack, coffee urn and a large bathroom with connecting bedroom. The bedroom was furnished with an electrically-powered hospital bed, rows of medicines, stacks of magazines, framed photographs of construction sites around the world and a small rectangular machine attached to a pedestal. The gray box sported several dials, a pressure gauge and an attached piece of corrugated plastic tubing with mouthpiece.

Farmer had brought J.J. along for assistance with any exotic medical paraphernalia which might be present, and called him from the den where he was examining Janus' *State of the Art* stereo system with more than a hint of lust. "J.J., come out of there before I have to arrest you for grand larceny and tell me what this thing is."

J.J. leaned against the doorframe wearing a disgusted look. "You know what he played on that system? Polka music; it's like using a Rolls Royce to plow a pasture field."

"Right, right," Farmer mumbled distractedly, "what's this thing here?"

"I.P.P.B. machine; excuse me, that stands for intermittent positive pressure breathing. Basically it's a machine which forces air into your lungs at pressures above normal barometric. Most long time emphysema patients have them. The idea is that since you can't take a deep breath the machine does it for you."

Farmer acknowledged the explanation with a grunt while fingering the tubing. "This little screw-on cap by the mouthpiece, J.J., is it for drugs?"

"Yeah, it's usually filled with an adrenalin-based drug which causes the upper airways to dilate."

J.J. didn't have to wait for his friend's next question, "The drug does have a stimulating effect on the heart which might cause irregular rhythms or even fibrillation. We could tell the difference between that and congestive heart failure with an autopsy."

Farmer sank comfortably into a reclining chair which commanded a splendid view of the valley below. "Well then that's what we're gonna

do," he said, stuffing his pipe with a thumb. "I can get the order over this drug possibility. It would leave traces wouldn't it, if it was given in a large enough dose to kill him?"

"Sure."

"Get on down there then. I can have you an order in a couple of hours."

Farmer was still in the reclining chair enjoying a pipe when Roger Janus arrived. Janus was perturbed but contained when told the house was off limits pending completion of an autopsy. After a few petulant references to high powered attorneys, he became almost conversational. "Would you mind telling me why, Captain?" he asked, seating himself on the bed.

"Of course not," Farmer answered. "Your brother was a very rich man whose death no one witnessed, at least no one we know of. Very rich men are often given a little shove toward their maker, usually by people not quite so rich. We just want to be sure this isn't one of those times."

Janus produced a cigarette from the gold case inside his cashmere sweater. "When I identified Ed's body I saw no bullet holes or blood. What makes you think he might have been murdered?"

"We'll just have to call it a hunch caused by twenty-five years of experience," said Farmer, emitting a tolerant sigh, "and it could always have been poison."

"But how?"

Farmer pointed the stem of his pipe at the machine. "Well sir, this machine is a possibility. I'm sure you know the little cup is for medicine. There are medicines and then there are medicines, if you follow me."

Roger Janus rose from the bed, thumbed through a back issue of *National Geographic*, replaced it on the end table and stood beside Farmer staring out the window. "Do I detect a note of accusation in your voice?" he asked politely.

"People usually do," answered Farmer; "it comes with being a policeman."

"In that case it may interest you to know that I was the last one to see Ed. I left to play golf and he was fine. At least as fine as his condition allowed."

"Careful, Mr. Janus, I'm sure you've seen enough TV shows to know anything you say can be used against you."

"That doesn't bother me in the least, Captain; if you'll let me finish I will explain why."

"Be my guest, Mr. Janus."

"Ed was as attached to that machine as an old maid to her cat. Any number of people can vouch for the fact that no one was allowed to touch it except him. He kept a gun in that drawer which I'm sure you've already found."

Farmer nodded.

"And he would have used it on myself or anyone who tried to tamper with that machine. No, Captain, I would have had to club Ed into submission to add anything to his lifeline. That's what he called it, you know."

"No, I didn't know."

"Well, it's true, he even drew up a special system to power it and had it installed in every room."

Farmer turned in his chair and frowned. "A special system? I thought it plugged right into that wall there."

Janus checked his watch, bored with the whole subject. "As you know, I'm an accountant, not an engineer. I'm not sure how it worked but I know it did. Now if you don't mind I have to go. I have an appointment."

TORONTO WAS CHILLY BUT ENLIGHTENING. Farmer had been forced to call in every favor owed him in order to squeeze plane fare out of the department after the autopsy on Janus came in negative. Everyone including J.J. had been ready to close the book, but the smile on Janus' face kept shining through the certainty lowering over the case like a cloud. That smile was there for a reason and Farmer wondered in a more personal than professional way what that reason was. Everyone else had other things to do but this was his last one. He could afford to indulge the lessons of twenty-five years in the trade.

People had a rhythm, and contrary to what a lot of people in L.A. believed, crime was not a natural part of that rhythm. Every criminal act from shoplifting to murder was a disruption in the perpetrator's rhythm as well as the victim's. A well developed feel for who was out of step could solve a lot of cases. "Just give me the right suspect," Farmer had said more times than his friends thought necessary, "and he'll supply the proof."

Roger Janus was out of step. Farmer had known it the first time he spoke to the man. He had the flat belly and clear skin of a man who drank very little but had smelled of booze. Then he had been just a little too ready with reasons why he couldn't have killed his brother and in that eagerness had volunteered just a little too much information.

After that second conversation Farmer had been sure brother Roger was a murderer. By his own admission he had the opportunity and the

trip to Toronto provided the motive.

There, in a private wing of a private hospital 85-year-old Conrad Janus had died of cancer one month before his son. The old man's worth was more than double that of his two sons, and with considerable help from the Toronto Police Department Farmer discovered that the entire estate had been left to Edward.

A short conversation with the old man's attorney confirmed the reason. Roger's beautiful wife Sybil had once been Conrad's beautiful wife Sybil. An old man losing his young wife to someone her own age isn't uncommon, but when that someone is a son it's particularly hard to swallow..

Some checking in L.A. revealed that Roger owned a small portion of Janus Construction but was, in effect, nothing more than a highly paid employee. With Edward dead Roger was the only living relative of Conrad Janus, the bulk of an immense fortune would go to him by default. *One of the classic motives Farmer had thought, juries love it because of its neatness. They would convict all right if he could come up with the third and most important element of any murder. How had Roger Janus managed to kill his brother and leave no trace of either a struggle or poison?*

Edward Janus' "lifeline" system still seemed the most plausible method, even though the autopsy had revealed nothing more than a therapeutic dose of medication in his system. The contractor who installed it couldn't conceal a note of pride while explaining the principle of its operation.

"Yes sir, Captain Farmer," he had said, rising from the chair in his office and gesturing with his hands, "It's real simple, like any good job should be. Ya see, Janus' machines were driven by compressed air, so what he needed was a system to pipe it to every room in his place. What we did was just bleed off the big air compressor that runs the purification system on his swimming pool. That way the whole thing was run out of that little block house by the pool where the chlorine tanks and compressor are."

"Don't most people use tablets instead of chlorine gas these days?" asked Farmer.

"Most people don't have a pool the size of Janus'. He had a regular municipal-sized set up there. Hell, gas is a little more dangerous but it's a lot less trouble and more efficient in the long run."

The old saw about a criminal returning to the scene of the crime might not be true, but Farmer had found it useful for a cop to return to the scene of the body when faced with a tough question. J.J. had confirmed what Farmer already suspected; that chlorine gas would have

left signs in the body of Edward Janus if it had been used to kill him. So the question still remained. What had been used?

"Well, I don't know, maybe he did die from his emphysema," said Farmer, thinking wistfully through photographs of Edward Janus and his dreamy smile.

"You really think so?" J.J. asked in a surprised voice.

"No, I think ole Roger killed him, but I'm damned if I know how. Just look at that smile, J.J. Janus looks like he's spaced out on some kind of a drug high."

J.J. was lounging in an old leather swivel chair, his long legs propped on his desk and the echo of his big feet hitting the floor was startling.

"He is."

"He is what?" asked Farmer.

"He's on a drug high. Roger gave him an overdose of the most common drug of all. It's so common we don't even notice it."

A COOL, DRY WIND FROM THE SIERRAS WAS MOVING through the dark pines of Edward Janus' estate with the perfumed grace of a woman in black silk. It was one o'clock in the morning, almost three days since the police quarantine was officially lifted. Farmer was sitting with his back against the sticky trunk of a Ponderosa pine thinking moodily of the preceding twenty-five years, almost wishing he could stay propped peacefully against a tree for the next twenty-five. His reverie was cut short by the familiar sharp thrill of a hunter as he watches dinner approach. *Got him*, thought Farmer as he spotted the lean form of Roger Janus move from a darkened pick-up truck to the compressor room by the pool. He emerged momentarily, trundling a dolly bearing a large green cylinder. Farmer let him get halfway down the length of the giant pool before signaling to the ten uniformed officers also hidden in the trees. "Mr. Janus, you're under arrest for the murder of your brother," Farmer said flatly. The look of hurt surprise on Janus' face made him look almost appealing.

"What's the meaning of this, Farmer? I have a right to . . ."

"Skip it, Janus. Save the performance for someone who cares. That tank you've got there is oxygen, and we confirmed before we lifted the quarantine that it was connected to the line from the compressor to your brother's breathing machine. All we needed to do was connect you to the tank. And we've just done that, haven't we?"

Janus lost his temper for the first time. "You son of a street walker," he shouted, "I don't know what you're talking about."

Farmer sucked noisily on his pipe. "Oh you know, all right, but just

so you know we know, I'll run it down for you. Your brother had emphysema for ten years, which caused him to be what's called a carbon dioxide retainer." Farmer was beginning to feel like J.J. "What that means, gentlemen," he said, gesturing to the knot of policemen, "is that there are two centers in your nervous system which make you breathe. One acts off a drop in your oxygen level, the other one off a rise in your carbon dioxide level. It's like double controls in an airplane. In case one goes out, the other will still keep you in the air. Now what happens after ten years and emphysema is that the one which operates off a rise in carbon dioxide dies. The only one you have left, the only thing which keeps you breathing, is a lowered oxygen level in your blood. Raise the oxygen level to normal and your body doesn't see any reason to keep breathing. You take nice, deep breaths, you feel good, except you breathe slower and slower and then you stop; and we all know what happens when you stop breathing don't we? You hooked that tank into your brother's system, Mr. Janus, a system normally operated off compressed air which is 21 percent oxygen. When he used his machine that day he was breathing 100 percent oxygen out of that tank you're holding in your hand. He passed out, you stopped in; remember you admitted you were there. You put an oxygen mask on him, connected it to the machine, and finished the job. You gave your brother an overdose, Mr. Janus, an overdose of a drug we all use. You might say you made him OD on life itself."

FARMER WAS RIGHT. THE JURY LOVED IT. They convicted Janus after deliberating only a half hour, and the judge gave him life. Outside the courtroom J.J. said, "You know Art, I think if you hadn't been retiring, Janus would have pulled it off. He knew how any bureaucracy worked, even the police department. When something's nice and neat people usually let it stay that way."

"Yeah," answered Farmer. "He didn't count on running into an old cop with a messy mind. By the way, thanks. You were the one who figured it out."

"You asked the right questions. We're a good team Art, for a couple old boys. Maybe you ought to think about that."

"Hmmm." Farmer sucked on his pipe. "You mean maybe we could do a little private work, sort of mess up the water some more?"

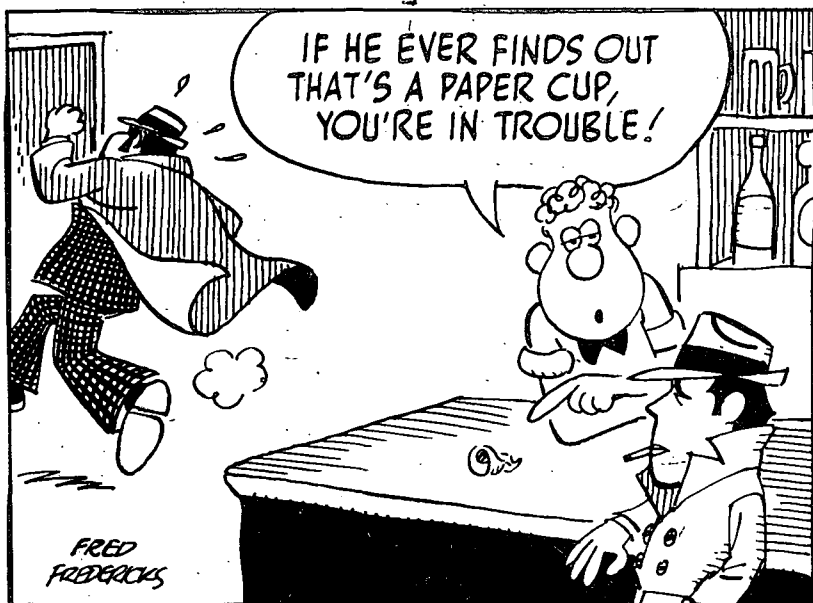
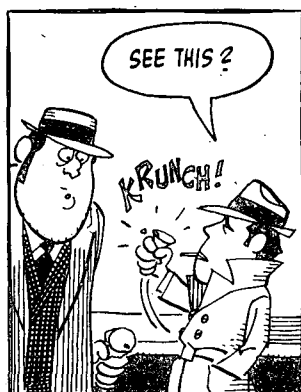
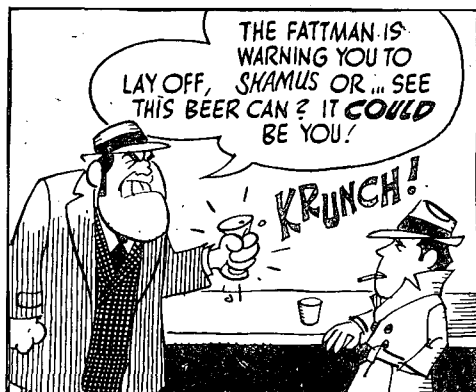
"Could be. You know I'm do to retire soon myself. No sense sittin' around on the front porch spittin' all day."

"Maybe, J.J. We probably got a few good years left in us at that. I'm going trout fishin for a couple of weeks. How about it?"

"Not me," said J.J. "I'm a city boy, that fresh air'll kill ya."

MIKE SHAMUS

by FRED FREDERICKS



STIFF COMPETITION

Book Reviews by JOHN BALL

A new book by Catherine Aird is always an event, but her latest, *Some Die Eloquent* must be rated a particular delight. Miss Aird writes the classic British murder mystery with Detective Inspector Sloan on the job, but the charm and wit of her writing put her work in a very select category: genuine entertainment. There is no need to go into details of the plot here, sufficient to say it is quite satisfactory, but it should be added that the irrepressible Constable Crosby is once again present and in action. No confirmed mystery reader should ask for more: Crosby is not to be missed. This excellent book is recommended all the way. Don't miss it. (Doubleday Crime Club, \$8.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

A long and engaging novel built on the international terrorist network is offered by an Israeli expert on the subject, Sabi H. Shabtai. Called *Five Minutes to Midnight*, Dr. Shabtai's book is filled with genuine people in the terrorist underground, including such figures as "Carlos" and his Japanese mistress Fumiko. The book gains considerable strength from the author's full knowledge of his subject, he offers a terrifying look at the people who chose to live by violence and shows the motivations that drive them to wild extremes. Although real people are used, they are not likely to emerge from the woodwork to sue, even though Fumiko's sexual parts are clinically described. The author overreaches himself in describing a terrorist incident in Washington, D.C. that every reader will know never occurred, but apart from this lapse the book is good and informative reading. (Delacorte, \$9.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

Hand Over Mind by Marc Lovell deals with a Canadian housewife who apparently is demonstrating automatic writing. The Ontario Psychic Society's Andrew Bailey is called upon to investigate. It should be stated that this is properly a detective story, and not an occult excursion of the Stephen King variety. A most readable book, and a good entertainment, but it must be added that some of the vital clues are withheld from the reader until the very end, something that the purists will rightfully find annoying. Bailey makes a very good and convincing detective and his logic is refreshing. (Doubleday Crime Club, \$7.95)



Kage Booton writes for the ladies in *Who Knows Julie Gordon?* This is a very thin little story about a young woman who is in the baby selling business. Unfortunately all of the people in this book are cut from pure cardboard and move about like puppets. If this weren't bad enough, just as the villain is about to triumph he is struck down by an unexpected act of God, a resolution that went out of fashion somewhat before *East Lynne*. Sorry, but this one is no go. (Doubleday Crime Club, \$8.95)



The followers, and they are many, of the hard-boiled private eye will welcome the debut of Cincinnati's Harry Stoner. He is very tough indeed and proves it when he plunges into a case that involves child pornography and also the sexual exploitation of pre-adolescents. A withered old man who is without funds "hires" him to find the sixteen year old who has been living with him in a grandfather/granddaughter relationship that is quite touching. As is usual in this type of story there are unsympathetic cops, homosexuality, and a lot of the seedy side of life as well as an old man's concern for a homeless and largely worthless girl. It's by Jonathan Valin, it's called *The Lime Pit*, and it proves that the writing of the gripping private eye story is far from a lost art. Excellent. (Dodd Mead, \$8.95)



Marian Babson is a British novelist recently introduced to this country by Walker. *The Lord Mayor of Death* was her debut here. Now she has given us *Murder Murder Little Star* and bless her for it. There is a murder more than half way through the book, but it is almost incidental to the story of an American film company that arrives in London to shoot a picture starring a twelve-year-old girl who is a classic *Enfant Terrible*. A middle-aged British lady is hired to be the brat's chaperone and to see that she drinks her milk. The resulting action is swiftly entertaining, so much so that we forgive Miss Babson for withholding the needed clues to the murderer. The final solution is genuinely unexpected. Recommended. (Walker, \$9.95)



Epidemic 9 by Richard Lerner M.D. and Max Gunther is a medical thriller about a rare disease that causes a kind of fur to grow rapidly on the body of its victims. This time the search for the carrier is complicated by a Swiss drug company that tries to cover up. The whole story is a little far out, but much of the book is absorbing despite the fact that

there have been several recent works with virtually the same plot, *The Andromeda Strain* being the best known. Only one quibble: it would have helped to have a little more development in the ending, showing us how the disease is finally brought under control. The question is left open, if the victims were marked for life or not. Set these reservations aside and you will probably be gripped by the people involved in this startling and previously unknown plague. (Morrow, \$10.95)



Celia Dale, who has been among those absent for some time, has come up with a book that may be unique in the literature. *The Deception* qualifies as a detective story when a gentle housewife with no resources or enemies is killed. The police investigation is detailed and highly accurate, praise be, but what sets the book aside is its totally detailed story of the people involved. More than half of the text is given over to a merciless examination of the principals and their backgrounds until at last the motive for senseless murder emerges. This is a serious novel, slow on action, but astonishing in character analysis and the depth of the author's grasp of her subject. Miss Dale, welcome back! (Harper and Row, \$8.95)



PAPERBACK ANNEX: For lo these many years Penguin has been steadily providing outstanding crime/suspense books in its familiar format. Whoever has been selecting the titles knows his job; some of the most recent from Penguin include Lionel Davidson, *The Chelsea Murders*; Peter Lovesey, *Wobble to Death*; Sebastien Japrisot, *The Lady in the Car with Glasses and a Gun* and also *Trap for Cinderella*; Geoffrey Household, *The Last Two Weeks of Georges Rivac*; Julian Symons, *The Blackheath Poisonings*; Sylvia Angus, *Dead to Rites*. These will keep you reading for a while, and every one of them is good.

Bantam Books has also been keeping up its excellent reputation for presenting excellent mystery writing in paperback. Some new items from Bantam include Clive Cussler, *Vixen 03*; Paul Zindel, *The Undertaker's Gone Bananas*; Ruth Rendall, *A Sleeping Life*; Frank Ross, *Sleeping Dogs*, (a genuine espionage thriller, but with the same general plot as *Telefon*); F. Lee Bailey, *Secrets* (A first novel of murder by the famous criminal lawyer); Whitley Strieber, *The Wolfen*; George Bishop, *The Apparition*.

—And can you believe it: two years ago many publishers were crying that the mystery/suspense novel was dead! Don't look now, but someone is lurking behind them, with an upraised knife. . .

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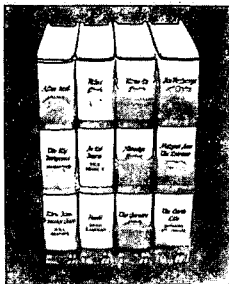
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